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D U S T.

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

IN THE

UNITED STATES

OF AMERICA

AND

D U S T

A NOVEL

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

AUTHOR OF "GARTH" "SEBASTIAN STROME" ETC.

*Only the actions of the Just
Smell sweet and blossom in the Dust.*

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1883.

D E S T

A. J. WILSON

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D U S T.

CHAPTER I.

AS Tom Bendibow left London and approached Kensington, the afternoon was warm and still, and slight puffs of dust were beaten upward by each impact of his horse's hoofs upon the dry road. The foliage of the trees, now past its first fresh greenness, had darkened considerably i hue, and was moreover dulled by the fine dust that had settled upon it during the preceding week of rainless weather. Pedestrians sought the grassy sides of the road, and fancied that the milestones were farther apart from each other than they ought to be; and, in the fields to the right and left, the few labourers who were still at work moved with

a lazy slowness, and frequently paused to straighten their backs and pass their brown forearms across their brows. Toward the north and west the pale blue of the sky was obscured by a semi-transparent film of a brownish tint, which ascended to meet the declining sun, and bade fair to overpower it ere its time. It was a day of vague nervous discomfort, such as precedes a thunderstorm, though there were no indications that a storm was brewing. On such a day neither work nor indolence is altogether comfortable; but the mind involuntarily loiters and turns this way and that, unready to apply itself to anything, yet restless with a feeling that some undefined event is going to occur.

Mr. Bendibow's mind did not lack subjects with which it might have occupied itself; nevertheless, no special mental activity was indicated by his features. He rode for the most part with head bent down, and a general appearance of lassitude and dejection. Once in a while he would cast his glance forward to take note of the way, or would speak a word to his horse; but thought seemed to be at a standstill within him; he was in the state of partial torpor which, in some natures, follows vivid and unusual emotion. He paid no heed to the meteorological phenomena, and if he

felt their effects at all, probably assigned them a purely subjective origin. The sunshine of his existence was obscured before its time, and the night was approaching. He looked forward to no storm, with its stress and peril and after-refreshment; but he was ill at ease and without hope; his path was arid and dusty, and the little journey of his life would soon be without object or direction.

For the moment, however, he had his mission and his message, and he must derive what enjoyment he might therefrom. He passed listlessly through Kensington, taking small note of the familiar buildings and other objects which met his sight. Had he not beheld them a thousand times before, and would he not see them as often again? A little while more and he began to draw near Hammersmith town, and now he sat more erect in his saddle and drew his hat down upon his brows, with the feeling that he would soon be at his destination. Passing the "Plough and Harrow," the ostler, who was crossing the road with his clinking pail, touched his forelock and grinned deferentially.

"Good day, sir—yer servant, sir! Tiresome weather to-day; a man can't 'ardly bear his flesh. Bound for Twick'nam, sir?"

Tom shook his head.

"Oh! beg parding, sir. Seein' Sir Francis drive by with the pair just now, I says to myself——"

"What's that?"

"The bar'net, sir—well, 'twas, mebbe, an hour since; and another party along with him. So, I says to myself——"

"Go to the dooce!" ejaculated Mr. Bendibow, putting his horse in motion.

"Thankee, sir; dry weather, this, sir; 'ope yer honour 'll keep yer health . . . Thankee, sir!" he added, deftly catching the coin which Tom tossed to him, and spitting upon it before thrusting it into his pocket; "and if ever yer honour wants to be put in the way of as pretty a piece of 'orseflesh . . ." But by this time Tom was out of earshot; so the ostler winked at the chambermaid, who was looking out of the inn window, and resumed his way across the street, whistling. Tom, meanwhile, after riding a quarter of a mile farther, turned off to the left, and presently drew rein in front of Mrs. Lockhart's gate. Marion was fixing some ivy to the side of the door; she turned round on hearing the horse's hoofs; and Mr. Bendibow, having lifted his hat, descended from the saddle and hitched his bridle to the

gate-post. Marion remained standing where she was.

"Good evening, Miss Lockhart," said Tom, advancing up the path; "don't know if you remember me—Mr. Bendibow. Hope I see you in good health."

"Thank you, sir. Have you ridden from London? You choose dusty weather."

Tom was aware of a lack of cordiality in the young lady's manner, and, being in a somewhat reckless mood, he answered bluntly, "As for that, I'm not out for my own pleasure, nor on my own business neither; and I ain't going to keep you long waiting. I've a letter here for Mr. Grant—that's the name the gentleman goes by, I believe; is he at home?"

"I think Mr. Grant is in the City; at all events, he is not here."

"I've a letter for him from Perdita—the Marquise Desmoines, that's to say," said Tom, producing the letter and twisting it about in his fingers, as if it were a talisman to cause the appearance of the person to whom it was addressed.

"If you'll give it to me, Mr. Grant shall have it when he returns," said Marion.

"That won't do—much obleeged to you all

the same; I'm to deliver it into his own hands. You don't know where I might find him, do you?" inquired Tom, feeling disconsolate at this miscarriage of his only remaining opportunity of usefulness in the world.

"He'll be back some time to-night; won't you wait for him here?" said Marion, softening a little from her first frigidity; "mother will be glad to see you, and . . ."

"Mr. Grant won't be back till toward midnight, but I can tell you where you'll find him," interposed a voice from the air above them—the voice of Mr. Philip Lancaster, who was leaning out of his window on the floor above. "How d'ye do, Mr. Bendibow? He's dining with your father at his place in Twickenham."

"Dining with my father! The dooce he is!" exclaimed Tom, not disguising the surprise which this information afforded him. "I take it you're quite sure of what you say, Mr.—er—Lancaster," he added, growing quite red as he stared up at that gentleman.

"Mr. Grant seemed quite sure of it when he left me to-day," Philip replied, smiling; "but the best-laid plans of mice and men gang aft aglee, you know."

"What's that? Well, it's beyond me, the

whole of it, that's all I know. Dining with Sir Francis, is he? Well, stifle me, if I'm going up there!" And Tom struck his foot moodily with his whip and stared at the fluttering ribbon on Marion's bosom.

"You won't come in, then?" said Marion, who began to have a suspicion that Mr. Bendibow had been taking a little too much wine after his dinner; wherein she did him great injustice, inasmuch as he had drunk scarce a pint of spirits in the last three days. Her tone so plainly indicated a readiness to abbreviate the interview, that poor Tom felt it all the way through his perplexity and unhappiness.

"No, I'm going, Miss Lockhart," he said, with a rueful bow, "I know I ain't on my good manners this evening, but I can't help it. If you only knew what a lot of things there is troubling me, you'd understand how 'tis with me. Beg your pardon for disturbing you, and wish you good evening."

"Good evening," said Marion, kindly; and unexpectedly she gave him her hand. He took it and pressed it hard, looking in her face. "Thank you," he said. "And I like you—by George, I do! and I wish there were more women like you in the world to care something about me." He

dropped her hand and turned on his heel, for there were tears in his eyes, and he did not wish Marion to see them. He reached the gate and mounted his horse, and from that elevation saluted Marion once more; but he bestowed merely a stare upon Philip and so rode away.

"I like that little fellow; I believe he has a good heart," remarked Marion, addressing herself to her ivy, but speaking to Philip.

"I'm afraid he doesn't like me," Philip rejoined.

She paused a moment, and then said, "I don't wonder at it."

"Why?" he demanded.

"Oh, I can put two and two together," answered she, nodding her head with a kind of ominous sagacity; and she would give no further explanation.

When Tom found himself on the high-road again, he stood for some time in doubt as to which way he should proceed. Obedience to Perdita required that he should ride on without delay to Twickenham; but so strongly had his feelings been revolted by the picture presented him of his father hob-nobbing amicably with the man who ought to have been, at best, his enemy, that he could not prevail upon himself to make a third at the

party. The mystery surrounding Sir Francis's relations with Grant had in fact entered, in Tom's opinion, upon so acute a stage of impropriety, that his own official recognition of them would necessitate instant open war and rebellion, and this crisis he was naturally willing to postpone. On the other hand, no real harm could come from waiting till next morning before delivering Perdita's letter, inasmuch as Mr. Grant could certainly not act upon it at that hour of the night. After a minute's irresolution, therefore, Tom turned his horse toward London, in an exceedingly bad humour.

But when he came in sight of the "Plough and Harrow" his troubled spirit conceived a sort of compromise. He would spend the night here instead of returning to London. He could then discharge his commission the first thing in the morning, and report to Perdita by breakfast time. The difference was not great; but such as it was, it was for the better. So into the courtyard of the inn he rode, with a curvet and a prance, and a despotic shout for the ostler.

Now, the ostler of the "Plough and Harrow" was an old acquaintance of Mr. Thomas Bendibow's, and under his guidance and protection Tom had enjoyed the raptures of many a cockfight and rat-catching, and had attended many an august

exhibition of the manly art of self-defence and had betted with varying fortune (according to the ostler's convenience) on many a private trial between horses whose jockeys were not bigotedly set on winning upon their merits. Latterly, it is true, the son of the baronet had made some efforts to walk more circumspectly than in the first flush of his hot youth, and, as a first step in this reformed career, he had abated the frequency of his consultations with Jim the ostler; and beyond an occasional chance word or two, and the exhibition on Tom's part of an eleemosynary half-crown, the friendship had outwardly fallen into disrepair.

But there are seasons when the cribbed and confined soul demands release and expansion, and yearns to immerse itself once again in the sweet old streams of habit and association that lead downwards, and afford a man opportunity to convince himself that some shreds of unregenerate human nature still adhere to him. Such a season had now come for Tom Bendibow, and he was resolved to let nature and the ostler have their way. Accordingly, when the latter, having seen to his patron's horse, and skilfully tested the condition of his temper, began to refer in guarded terms to the existence of the loveliest pair of ban-

tam chickens as hever mortal heyes did see, Tom responded at once to the familiar hint, and no long time elapsed ere he found himself in the midst of surroundings which were more agreeable than exclusive. Into the details of these proceedings it will not, however, be necessary for us to follow him. It is enough to note that several hours passed away, during which the heir of the Bendibows subjected himself to various forms of excitement, including that derived from a peculiarly seductive species of punch; and that finally, in obedience to a sudden impulse, which seemed whimsical enough, but which was no doubt directly communicated to him by the finger of fate, he sprang to his feet and loudly demanded that his horse be brought out and saddled forthwith, for he would ride to Twickenham.

"Never you go for to think of such a thing, Mr. Bendibow," remonstrated Jim the ostler with much earnestness. "Why, if the night ben't as Terribus, I'll heat my nob; and footpads as thick betwixt 'ere and there as leaves in Wallumbrogia!"

"Have out my horse in two minutes, you rascal, or I'll footpad you! Look alive, now, and don't let me hear any more confounded gabble; d'ye hear?"

"It do go ag'in my conscience, Mr. Bendibow," murmured the ostler sadly, "it do, indeed! Howsumever, your word is law to me, sir, now as hevermore; so 'ere goes for it!" and he arose and departed stablewards. And, on the whole, he had no reason to be dissatisfied with his night's work, as the plumpness of his breeches pocket testified.

Mr. Bendibow's horse had spent the time more profitably than his master; yet he scarcely showed more disposition to be off than did the latter. There was a vaulting into the saddle, a clatter of hoofs, and a solitary lantern swinging in the hand of Jim the ostler, as he turned and made his way slowly back to his quarters, wondering what hever could 'ave got into that boy to be hoff so sudden.

The boy himself would have found it difficult to answer that question. A moment before the resolve had come to him he had anticipated it no more than his horse did. But once he had said to himself that he would ride out and meet Mr. Grant on the way back from Twickenham, the minutes had seemed hours until he was on his way. There was no reason in the thing; but many momentous human actions have little to do with reason; and, besides, Tom was not at this time in a condition of mind or body in which the dictates

of reason are productive of much effect. He felt that he must go, and nothing should stand in his way.

When the ostler had affirmed it was dark, he said no more than the truth. The brown film which had begun to creep over the heavens before sunset had increased and thickened, until it pervaded the heavens like a pall of smoke, shutting out the stars and blackening the landscape. It was neither cloud nor fog, but seemed rather a new quality in the air, depriving it of its transparency. Such mysterious darkenings have been not unfrequent in the history of the English climate, and are called by various names and assigned to various causes, without being thereby greatly elucidated. Be the shadow what and why it might, Tom rode into the midst of it and put his horse to a gallop, though it was scarcely possible to see one side of the road from the other. He felt no anxiety about losing his way, any more than if he had been a planet with a fore-ordained and inevitable orbit. The silence through which he rode was as complete as the darkness; he seemed to be the only living and moving thing in the world. But the flurry of the dissipation he had been through, and the preoccupation of his pur-

pose, made him feel so much alive that he felt no sense of loneliness.

It had been his intention to take the usual route through Kew and Richmond; but at Brentford Bridge he mistook his way, and, crossing the river there, he was soon plunging through the obscurity that overhung the Isleworth side of the river. If he perceived his mistake, it did not disconcert him; all roads must lead to the Rome whither he was bound. Sometimes the leaves of low-lying branches brushed his face; sometimes his horse's hoofs resounded over the hollowness of a little bridge; once a bird, startled from its sleep in a wayside thicket, uttered a penetrating note before replacing its head beneath its wing. By-and-by the horse stumbled at some inequality of the road, and nearly lost its footing. Tom reined him in a sharply, and, in the momentary pause and stillness that ensued, he fancied he distinguished a faint, intermittent noise along the road before him. He put his horse to a walk, pressed his hand over his breast, to make sure that the letter was safe in its place, and peered through the darkness ahead for the first glimpse of the approaching horseman who he made sure was near. But he was almost within reach of him before he was aware, and, had turf been under foot instead of stony

road, the two might have passed each other without knowing it.

"Hullo!" cried Tom.

"Hullo, there!" responded a voice, sharp but firm. "Who are you?"

"I'm Tom Bendibow. You're Charles Grantley, ain't you?"

"You have good eyes, sir," answered the other, bringing his horse close alongside of Tom's, and bending over to look him in the face.

"It's ears and instinct with me to-night," was Tom's reply. "That's all right, then. I came out to meet you. I have a letter for you from your daughter."

"Do you ride on, Mr. Bendibow, or shall you return with me?" inquired the other, after a pause.

"I'll go with you," said Tom, and, turning his horse, the two rode onward together side by side.

CHAPTER II.

PHILIP LANCASTER had gone to bed early this night; he sat up all the night before, trying to compel unwilling rhymes to agree with one an-

other, and was now resolved to discover what poetic virtue lay in sleep. But sleep proved as unaccommodating as rhyme. He could not discharge his brain of the crowd of importunate and unfruitful thoughts sufficiently to attain the calm necessary for repose. In fact, he had more than loose ends of poetry to disturb him; his relations with Marion had not been in tune since the mishap in Richmond Park, and she had, up to this time, avoided explanations with a feminine ingenuity that was not to be out-manœuvred. He understood, of course, that a lady who has allowed herself to betray special regard for a man may feel offended by the discovery that the man has had intimate relations with another lady; but, as between himself and Marion, matters had not gone so far as an explicit declaration, on her side at all events; and it was, therefore, peculiarly difficult to accomplish a reconciliation. Not less difficult was it, apparently, to begin over again at the beginning, and persuade her to love him on a new basis, as it were. Her position was this—that she would not yield as long as any ambiguity remained touching the past relations of himself and Perdita; and that her pride or perversity would not suffer her to let that ambiguity be cleared up. Possibly, moreover, Philip may have felt that, even were the

opportunity given, the ambiguity in question might not be easily removed. In these circumstances his most prudent course, as a man of the world, would have been to renounce Marion altogether. She was not indeed, from any wordly point of view, a desirable match. More than this, she was chargeable with certain faults of temper and temperament—faults which she herself was at no pains to disguise. She was not even beautiful in the conventional sense: Philip had seen many women far more generally attractive. Finally, he could not so much as be certain that she had ever positively loved him; her regard for him may have been no more than a fancy which no longer swayed her . . . But, when all was said, Philip knew that there was something rare, tender, and noble—which he had never found elsewhere, and which he would never find save in her. And that he had found this and recognised it was to him reason for believing that Marion must also have perceived something worthy of love in him. Their hands, whose clasp had been severed once, would yet find one another again. Nevertheless, in more despondent moods, Philip would remind himself that love often ended in loss, and that we never reach the happiness we had imagined. It was into such a mood that that he had fallen to-night.

At one time, as he lay on his bed, encompassed by darkness on which his weary mind could paint no cheerful image, he thought he heard light noises in the house, as if some one were still stirring. Had Mr. Grant returned home? No; his firm and precise step, ascending the stair, would have been unmistakable. It could not be Mrs. Lockhart, either; she was of a placid constitution, and reposed peacefully and long. Presumably, therefore, the author of the sounds was Marion, who was quite as apt to be awake at night as in the daytime, and who might have gone downstairs to get a book. A door downstairs seemed to open and shut softly, and a draught of air came up the staircase and rattled the latch of Philip's room. Could Marion have gone out? Philip was half inclined to get up and investigate. But the house was now quite still; and by-and-by, as he became more drowsy, he began to think that his imagination had probably played him a trick. There were always noises in old houses, at night, that made themselves. Philip was falling asleep.

But all at once he found himself wide awake, and sitting up in bed. Had he dreamed it, or was there really a knock and a voice at his door—a voice that went further into his heart than any other? Then again—

"Philip Lancaster!"

He was on his feet in a moment. "Yes, Marion. What is it?"

"I want your help. Get ready and come quickly."

"Yes," he said, speaking low as she had done: and in a few minutes he had dressed himself and opened the door. She was standing there with bonnet and cloak.

"What has happened?" he asked in a whisper.

"Have you your pistol? We may need it."

"It is here," he said, stepping back to the wardrobe and taking the weapon from a drawer. At the same time he nerved himself as a man of courage who is called upon to face an unknown danger. For there was something in Marion's manner and in the silent influence emanating from her presence that impressed him more than any words could have done with the conviction of a nearness of peril, and of intense purpose on her part to meet and avert it. For a moment the suddenness of the summons and its mysterious import had sent the blood tremulously to Philip's heart. But as he crossed the threshold of his room Marion put out her hand and touched and clasped his own. Her touch was warm and firm, and immediately a great surge of energy and strength went through Philip's body, making him feel

doubly himself and ready to face and conquer all the evil and wickedness of the world. The spiritual sympathy between Marion and himself, which had been in abeyance, was reawakened by that touch, and rendered deeper and more powerful than before. Their will and thought were in accord, visitating and confirming each other. And in the midst of his suspense and of the hardening of his nerves to confront an external demand, he was conscious inwardly of a great softening and exaltation of his spirit, which, however, enhanced his external firmness instead of detracting from it. It was the secret might of love, which enters into all faculties of the mind and heart, purifying and enlarging them. Love is life, and is capable of imparting force to the sternest as well as to the tenderest thoughts and deeds.

Marion now led the way downstairs, and Philip followed her, treading lightly and wondering at what moment his strength and valour would be called upon. Marion opened the outer door, and when it closed behind them the strange blackness of the night pressed upon their eyes like a material substance. At the gate, however, appeared a small light, seemingly proceeding from a lantern, but it had very little power to disperse its rays. Nevertheless, Philip was able dimly to perceive

a large white object outside the gate, which, by the aid of mother-wit, he contrived to identify as a horse. And the lantern in Marion's hand presently revealed that the horse was attached to a waggon. She hung the lantern on the side of the waggon and loosed the horse's rein.

"Get in after me," she said, "and then I'll tell you which way to drive."

"Well?" said Philip, when he had taken his place.

"When we get to the highway, keep to the right and cross the bridge. After that I'll tell you more."

"How did the horse and waggon come here?" Philip inquired.

"I got them just now from Jebson, the baker. He is an obliging man, and I knew he would let me have them without asking what I wanted them for."

"Then 'twas you I heard go out a while ago?"

"Yes. I've been feeling it coming all the afternoon. At last I could bear it no longer. If it had been anything else, I would have done nothing. But to risk his life, merely for fear of being mistaken, was too much."

"Whose life, Marion?"

She made no answer at first; but, when he

turned towards her and sought to read her face in the darkness, she said reluctantly:—

“Mr. Grant’s.”

“His life in danger?” Philip exclaimed, greatly surprised. “How do you know?”

Again the girl was silent. But after a minute she said: “you remember Tom Bendibow’s being here this afternoon . . . You told him Mr. Grant was at Twickenham. He was coming home late. The road isn’t safe on a night like this, and he carried no arms.”

“Oh! then all your fear is that he may be attacked by footpads?” said Philip, feeling relieved. He had apprehended something more definite.

“I fear he will be attacked,” was her reply.

“But in that case,” rejoined Philip, after a few moments’ reflection, “we ought to turn to the left. The road from Twickenham lies through Richmond.”

“We should not find him there,” said Marion. “He will come through Isleworth.”

“Did he tell you so?”

“No. I didn’t know he was going to Twickenham until you said so.”

“Then why should you . . . The Isleworth road is at least a mile longer.”

"We shall find him there," she repeated, in a low voice. And presently she added, with a manifest effort, "I will tell you—something. You may as well know."

"You may trust me," said Philip, strangely moved. He could not conceive what secret there could be, connecting her with Grant, and indicating danger to the latter; and the thought that she should be involved in so sinister a mystery filled him with a tender poignancy of solicitude.

"You may not think it much—it is something about myself," she said, partly turning away her head as she spoke. "I've never said anything about it to anyone; mother would not understand, and father—he would have understood, perhaps, but it would have troubled him. Indeed, I don't understand it myself—I only know how it happens."

"It's something that keeps happening, then!" demanded Philip, more than ever perplexed.

As Marion was about to reply, the left side of the waggon lurched downwards, the horse having, in the darkness, taken them over the side of the road. Philip pulled his right rein violently, and it gave way, Mr. Jebson's harness being old and out of repair. Philip jumped down to investigate the damage by the aid of the lantern.

"If I can find a bit of string, I can mend it," he reported to Marion.

"I'll give you my shoe-strings," she said, stooping to unfasten them. "They are of leather and will hold. But be quick, Philip, or we shall be too late!"

There was such urgency in her tone, that had Philip needed any stimulus, it would have been amply provided. He repaired the break with as much despatch as was consistent with security, and then resumed his seat beside Marion.

"I fear we shall be too late," she repeated; "we should have started earlier. It's my fault; I waited too long."

"Are you so certain—" began Philip; but she interrupted him.

"Do you remember the time Mr. Grant came home before, when they tried to shoot him and he fell from his horse?"

"Yes; you went out and met him."

"Yes because I knew he was coming; when we were standing there by the open window, and the flash of lightning came, I knew he was hurt. I would have gone then, only I tried to think it was my fancy; I was afraid to find I was mistaken. And when I think of it in one way—as other people would—it always seems as if it could

not be true—until it happens. It has been so ever since I was a little girl."

"Oh, a presentiment!" murmured Philip, beginning to see light.

"The name makes no difference," returned Marion, seeming to shiver a little. "The day my father was killed, I saw him. I saw him, with the wound in his breast. I said to myself, if that turned out to be true, I should know always afterwards that I must believe. When you came and told how you found him, you only told what I had seen. I could have corrected you, you had made a mistake."

"You saw him?" echoed Philip.

"I saw him—something in me saw him; just as I saw Mr. Grant this evening. But it wasn't that he came to me—that he appeared before me like a ghost; but I was where he was, and saw the place as well as him. It is at the bend of the road, not far from the little brook that runs into the river."

"I have heard of such a power, but I never knew of it," Philip said. "But, Marion, if this peril to Mr. Grant has not happened yet, you must have seen not merely what was beyond your sight, but what was in the future. How could that be?"

"I don't know; it's no use trying to know. It can't be reasoned about, unless you can tell what time and space are. When such things happen to me, there seems to be no future and no past; it is all the same—all one now. And no good ever comes of my seeing; the things come to pass, and I cannot help it. It has been a curse to me; but if we could only save Mr. Grant, I would thank God!"

"We shall soon know about that," said Philip; "as near as I can make out in this blackness, we must be pretty near the place you spoke of by this time."

Marion made no reply, save by a slight movement, as if she were drawing herself together, and they drove on in silence. Their conversation had been carried on in low tones, but with deep and tremulous emphasis on Marion's part; she was roused and moved in a way that Philip had never seen before; the activity of the singular power which she believed herself to possess had caused the veil which usually obscured her character to roll back; and Philip was conscious of the immediate contact, as it were, of a nature warm, deep, passionate, and intensely feminine. The heavy darkness and silence of night that enveloped him and her was made, in a sense, luminous by this

revelation, and the anticipation of the adventure which lay so short a distance before them overcame the intellectual coldness which was the vice of his character, and kindled the latent energies of his soul. How incongruous sounded the regular and methodical footfall of the old white horse, duskily visible in the gloom as he plodded between the shafts.

A few minutes passed thus; and then a hard, abrupt noise rang out, ending flatly without an echo. The distance from which it came seemed not more than a hundred yards. The horse threw up his head and partly halted, but immediately resumed his jog-trot. Philip, holding the reins in his left hand, grasped his pistol with his right, and cocked it. Marion rose to her feet, and sent forth her voice, with an astonishing volume of sound, leaping penetratingly into the night. Another shout answered hers more faintly from the blind region beyond. It was not repeated. The waggon jolted roughly over a narrow bridge that spanned a still-flowing brook. Then, like a sudden portentous birth out of sable chaos, sprang the scrambling speed of a horse's headlong gallop, and a dark mass hustled by, with fiery sparks smitten from the flinty road by iron-shod hoofs. It passed them and was gone, plunging into invisibility with

a sort of fury of haste, as of a lost spirit rushing at annihilation.

Philip had raised his weapon to fire, but a shade of doubt made him forbear to pull the trigger. This man might not be the guilty one, and to kill an innocent man would be worse than to let a guilty man escape. Marion, who was looking straight forward, had not seemed to notice the figure at all as it swept past. All her faculties were concentrated elsewhere. The old white horse, apparently startled out of his customary impassivity, lifted up his nose and rattled the waggon along at a surprising rate. But the journey was nearly at an end.

A little way beyond the bridge, the road, which had heretofore lain between hawthorn hedges, out of which, at intervals, grew large elm or lime trees, suddenly spread out to three or four times its general breadth, forming a sort of open place of oval shape, and about half an acre in area. The road passed along one side of this oval; the rest was turf, somewhat marshy towards the left. Philip stopped the horse, and he and Marion got down. He took the lantern, and they went forward on foot. The narrow rays of the lantern, striking along the ground in front, rested flickeringly upon a dark object lying near the edge of

the road, next the turf. They walked up to the object, and Philip stooped to examine it, Marion standing by with her head turned away. But, at an exclamation from Philip, she started violently and began to tremble.

"There are two here!" he said.

Marion's teeth chattered. "Dead?" she said, in a thin voice.

"No. At least, one of them is not. His heart beats, and . . . Yes, he's trying to say something." Philip stooped lower and let all the light of the lantern fall on this man's face. "I don't recognise him—or—why, it's Bendibow!"

Marion caught her breath sharply. "Sir Francis?"

"No, no—Tom Bendibow."

Marion said nothing, but knelt down beside the other figure, which was lying prostrate, and turned it over, so that the face was revealed. It was Mr. Grant, and he was dead, shot through the heart. After a few moments she looked up at Philip and said, huskily:

"You should have fired at him."

CHAPTER III.

THE dead man's horse had disappeared, and was probably trotting back to his stable in Twickenham. But Tom Bendibow's steed, which knew its master, could be heard cropping the herbage a few rods away, at the other end of the open place. This sound, and the struggling breathing of Tom himself, were distinctly audible in the stillness of the night.

Marion, after there was no longer any doubt as to Mr. Grant's being dead, sat for several minutes motionless and silent, his head resting on her lap. Philip meanwhile was examining Tom's injuries, which proved to be a crushing blow at the base of the head, behind the right ear, and two upper ribs on the same side broken, apparently by the stamp of a horse's hoof. It seemed hardly possible that he could live long.

"Shall I lift them into the waggon?" he asked Marion. "We should lose no time in getting home."

"If you take out the seat of the waggon, they

can lie at full length," she said. "I will get in with them. You must ride Mr. Bendibow's horse and lead ours."

The plan was as good as the circumstances admitted; and Philip, assisted by Marion, succeeded in lifting the two lifeless weights into the bottom of the vehicle, in which had previously been placed a kind of pillow, improvised out of Philip's coat and Marion's shawl. Marion then got in and supported Tom in such a manner that the jolting might distress him as little as possible: and finally, Philip, having caught and mounted Tom's horse, grasped the reins of the baker's phlegmatic steed, and the party moved forward. The strange darkness, which had been at its densest at the moment of the catastrophe, now began to lighten; a star or two appeared towards the east, and gradually the heavy veil of obscurity was withdrawn in the direction of the west and south. The faces of the two victims were faintly revealed. Mr. Grant's countenance bore a serene and austere expression; but poor Tom's features were painful to contemplate—the heaviness of insensibility alternated there with the contractions of suffering. "Poor boy!" Marion murmured, more than once, but with an inward and musing tone, as if her compassion extended to something beyond his physical calamity.

At other times this compassionate aspect gave place to an expression of stern severity; and this again was once or twice succeeded by a beautifully tender look, which deepened her eyes and made her lips move tremulously. Few words were exchanged between her and Philip during their sad journey, which seemed to both of them as long as a lifetime, and yet brief.

Brief or long, the journey ended at last, and in the paleness of early dawn, Philip, with the help of the astounded baker, who had been aroused for the purpose, carried Tom Bendibow and the body of Mr. Grant through the iron gate, and beneath the overspreading limbs of the cedar, and into the house where Mrs. Lockhart, horror-stricken and speechless, stood to receive them. Then the baker was sent for a physician; the dead man's body was laid on the bed in his chamber, and Philip did whatever was possible to make Bendibow comfortable in his own room. The latter had by this time begun to regain the use of his senses, and with these—though only feebly and at intervals—the power of speech.

“Did the . . . fellow who did this . . . get off?” was his first question. To which Philip replied in the affirmative.

After a pause Tom resumed: "Well, I'm done for!"

"Nothing of the sort: you will be all right in time," said Philip.

"No; I am a dead man; and . . . I'll tell you what, I'm . . . glad of it!" He said this with all the emphasis at his command. By-and-by he added, "What about the . . . old gentleman?"

"Shot through the heart."

Several minutes passed, and Philip thought that Tom was relapsing into unconsciousness, when he suddenly exclaimed: "Do you mean to say he's dead?"

"He died instantly."

"Give me . . . some water," said Tom, with a ghastly expression; and after he had drunk, he continued, "I tried to help; but when I heard his voice . . ." he broke off abruptly.

"Whose voice? Oh, you mean Marion's—Miss Lockhart."

"Very likely," said Tom. "I'd better tell you how it all came on: I shan't be of any use by the time the inquest begins. I rode over the river to meet him . . . to give the letter, you know. Took the wrong road, but he'd taken it too, so . . . we rode along together, talking, first about

Perdita: then he spoke of Miss Lockhart . . . she was on his mind; he liked her, didn't he?"

"That's strange!" muttered Philip to himself.

"And we talked about . . . well, no matter. Then my girths got loose and I got down to tighten 'em, and he rode on. Just as I was mounting I heard another horse coming along . . . and there seemed to be some row . . . I rode up. I heard him say, 'Hand it over . . .'"

"The highwayman said that?"

"Yes," replied Tom, after a long pause. "By that time I was almost on 'em. He fired; by the flash I saw his face . . . Oh, my God!"

"You would know him again, then?"

"I shall never see him again," replied Tom, with a certain doggedness of tone. His bearing during this conversation had been so singular, and in some respects so unaccountable, that Philip was disposed to think his mind was affected. "You had better rest," he said kindly.

"I shall rest—till Judgment Day," replied the wounded youth; "and I shan't say much more before then. Oh, I have my wits about me . . . more now than when that shot was fired! Just after that I heard a call somewhere down the road; I shouted back. Then he rode at me and hit me with the butt of his pistol. Well, he's a

villain; but it's better for me to die than to hang him. I've had enough."

At this point Marion came to the door with a letter in her hand, and as Philip approached her, she said to him in a low voice: "I found this in Mr. Grant's pocket. It is addressed to Perdita Desmoines. What shall be done about it?"

Philip took the letter from her and looked at it. It was enclosed in a sealed packet of stout paper, and the address was in Mr. Grant's handwriting. Its appearance indicated that it been kept for some time; the corners were dog-eared and the edges somewhat worn. Across the corner of the packet was the following indorsement:

"In case of my decease to be handed at once to the person to whom it is addressed, and on no account to be opened by any other person.

J. G."

"I can't leave here at present," said Lancaster, "and 'twould not be safe to trust it to a messenger. Let it wait till this evening or tomorrow."

"What's that about Perdita?" demanded Tom from the bed; for, with the abnormal acuteness of perception that sometimes characterises the dying, he had caught her name. "A letter for her? Send for her, Miss Lockhart, please! I want to see her before I go.

And she ought to be here, besides. Tell her that he's dead and I'm dying, and she'll come."

Philip questioned Marion's face with a look, and she responded by a look of assent. She had long ago divined the secret of poor Tom's love, and now the new birth in her own heart had quickened her sympathies towards all lovers. "I will write her a message and send it off immediately," she said, walking up to the bedside and touching the boy's hand softly with her own. "She will be here by the time the surgeon has dressed your wounds, and then you will be feeling better. You are not to die, sir. Madame Desmoines and I will nurse you and make you well."

"That's all right," said Tom, closing his eyes with a sigh; and, yielding to his exhaustion, he sank into a semi-somnolent state which seemed likely to last some time.

"By-the-by," said Philip, when Marion had written her message to Perdita, "there's this boy's father; I forgot about him; he must be summoned instantly. I'll send word to him post-haste."

"Do you think he will come?" she answered, glancing at him for a moment and then looking away. But before Philip could reply to so singular a query, she responded to herself, "I suppose he would. And it would be worth while to have

him here. Mr. Grant was his guest last night. He might help in finding the murderer."

"After what I've seen to-night," Philip remarked, "I should hardly like to ask you where the murderer is."

"This is different," she returned. "I know nothing. I see only people that I love. Don't think of me that way, Philip."

"You know how I think of you, Marion."

"If I did not, I could not bear this."

They were in the little sitting-room downstairs, standing by the window where they had so often stood before. Overhead was audible occasionally the soft foot-fall of Mrs. Lockhart, moving about in the room where Grant lay. The east was exquisite with the tints of approaching sunrise, and the calm and strength of nature made the morning sweet. The earth, which had wheeled through the light and darkness, the life and death, of so many myriad years, still maintained her tireless pace no less freshly than on the first day. Could a human heart, also, turn as hopefully from the shadows of the past, and voyage onward through untravelled paths towards the source of light, or must the dust and gloom of weary years still cling to it and make its progress dreary? Love is truly life: deprived of it, body

and soul alike stagnate and decline; but, gifted with its might, we breathe the air of heaven even in the chamber of death, and our faces are illuminated even in a dungeon.

It was in the air and light of this immortal morning that Marion and Philip now looked at each other, brightened thereby from within as the sunrise brightened them from without. The utterance of their hearts was visible in their eyes, and there was hardly need of words. But the love which has not avowed itself in words is incomplete.

"Will you be my wife, Marion?" said Philip.

"Have you known me long enough?" was her reply.

"I have known you all my life."

"But to have me will be more wearisome than to know me."

"Marion, I love you."

"I love you, Philip. Oh, Philip, can this be happiness that makes my heart ache so? If I did not know there was so much sorrow in the world, I could hardly live! Can Philip Lancaster belong to me, and I to him? I am afraid to have you know how much I love you. I am afraid to know myself. No! I will not be afraid. Take me, Philip! Kiss me." . . .

It was with reverence that Philip kissed her first; but then love overcame him. There was no one like her in the world. He would be a hero and a saint for her sake.

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About nine o'clock in the morning, Perdita, Marquise Desmoines, drove up to the gate. She alighted and walked quickly up the path to the door. Her face was vivid, and her bearing alert and full of life. Philip met her at the entrance.

"Is Tom really dying?" was her first question.

"He seems to wish it, and the surgeon gives no encouragement. He is anxious to see you."

"Is it known who did this?"

"Nothing as yet. Tom Bendibow seemed to have something on his mind, but I think he wanders a little. He may speak more explicitly to you."

"Take me to him," said Perdita; and when they were at the door of the room she added: "I will see him alone." So Philip went away thoughtfully.

Perdita closed the door and moved up to the bedside.

Tom's face was turned towards her; it had

the pallor of coming death upon it, but her propinquity seemed to check the ebbing current of vitality, and to restore the poor youth in some measure to himself.

"Good morning, Perdita," he said, with a feeble echo of cheerfulness in his tone. "I told you yesterday I'd like to die for you, and here I am at it, you see!"

"Do anything but that, Tom. I want you to live."

"It can't be done now. I don't believe even your marrying me would keep me alive now!" said Tom, though with an intonation as if the matter were open to question. "And it's just as well, you know. I had no notion till now how easy dying is. It doesn't hurt half so much as a licking at school. I rather like it."

"I wish I knew who struck you," said Perdita, with a frown in her eyes.

"Nobody shall ever know that: I've made up my mind!" said Tom gravely.

"Do you know, Tom?"

"Yes, I do know. I wanted to tell you that much, though I'll tell nothing more. And it's just as well I'm going, for I couldn't stand keeping such a secret long. Don't try to guess it, Perdita, please. Whoever he is, he's got worse than

hanging already. Let's talk about other things. I found him—your father—and gave him the letter. He never read it; the night was like pitch. But we spoke about you. We've all of us made a mistake about him; he was true grit, I can tell you. Oh, here's a letter for you, that came out of his pocket! I'm glad of it, for it was an excuse for sending for you."

Perdita received the packet in her hand, but scarcely glanced at it. She leaned over the helpless figure of the last of the Bendibows, and stroked the hair on his forehead with a touch as light and soothing as the waft of a breeze. "My dear, dear Tom," she said, "I wish I could have made you happy. I am not happy myself."

"You do make me happy: and if . . . I say, Perdita . . ."

"What, dear?"

"Do you remember, when I left you yesterday, I couldn't kiss your hand, because I felt . . . I'd better not. But now, you know . . ."

"You shall kiss my lips, dear, if you care to," said Perdita, bending her lovely face near him.

"Oh . . . But not yet, Perdita; not quite yet. Because I should like that to be the last thing . . . the very last of all, you know. You go on

and read your letter, and let me hold your hand; and when I am ready I'll press it, so; and then . . . will you?"

"Yes, anything you like, dear," she answered.

She broke the seal of the packet. It contained a second enclosure, also sealed. But there were also a loose fold of paper, on which was written the following:—

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER: This will come to you when I am no more. It contains the explanation of the Past: why I left you; what manner of man I, your father, was. This information is comprised in letters written by myself and others twenty years ago. I have kept them by me ever since as a measure of defence against possible injury. After I am dead they will no longer serve this use, and I do not require you to peruse them. You may, if you see fit, burn them unread; but if you feel a curiosity as to your father's real fate and character, I do not forbid you to read them. Act herein according to your own inclinations and judgment, and I shall be content. But I request you in no case to act against any other person on the authority of what is contained here. What is past in our lives may be used to increase wis-

dom and charity, but should never be made the instrument of revenge.

"My dear daughter, I have loved you heartily all my life. I pray that God may bless you and make you noble and pure.

"Your father,

"CHARLES JOHN GRANTLEY."

After reading and re-reading this letter, Perdita sat for some time lost in thought. Should she open the other packet? Might it not be wiser to burn it?

Her hand had been lying in Tom's meanwhile, though she had almost forgotten it. On a sudden she felt a slight pressure; very slight, but it made her turn quickly and look at him. It was easy to read the tidings of that face; pinched, pallid, lacking in beauty and dignity; but the face of a man who loved her and who was at the point of death. She put her mouth to his and kissed him. His lips just reponded and no more.

A carriage drove rapidly up to the gate and Sir Bendibow's footman rapped loudly on the door.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LOCKHART met Sir Francis at the door; he greeted her in a voice louder than ordinary; but harsh, as if the conventional instinct in him had overstrained itself in the effort to hold its own. An analogous conflict between the shuddering emotion within and the social artifices to disguise it, was manifest in his face, which rigidly and, as it were, violently performed the usual motions of smiling and elegantly composing itself when all the while these polite antics were betrayed and falsified by the grim reality of ghastly pallor and suspense. And there was no necessity for the baronet to maintain the customary elaboration of his fine manners. No one would have expected it of him under the present circumstances: on the contrary, it would have had a repugnant effect, even had he been actor enough to make the pretence seem genuine. But men like Sir Francis, who had trained their minor natural impulses to wear stays and turn out their toes (so to say), are liable to be thus embarrassed by the fearful summons of some real passion of the heart: they pitifully strive to clothe the giant in the pigmy's

bagwig and small-clothes, and are too much bewildered to perceive the measureless incongruity.

"Good morning, madam; charmed to see you looking so well," were the baronet's first words to poor Mrs. Lockhart, who immediately burst into tears, partly because she thought Sir Francis had gone mad, and partly because the contrast between her feelings and his observation was so grotesque. "Is—er—all are well, I hope?" he proceeded, while the questioning agony in his bloodless lips and staring eyes seemed to belong to another being than he who uttered the meaningless phrases.

"I only hope you may not have come too late, dear Sir Francis," she said, instinctively replying to his look instead of to his words. "Poor Mr. Grant—he was murdered outright, but your son . . ." she faltered, and resumed her tears . . .

The baronet stood at the foot of the stairs, with his hat under his arm and one knee bent—a most unexceptionable attitude. He was dressed at least as fastidiously as usual, only that, in shaving, he had accidentally cut his cheek, and the blood had trickled down and stained his else immaculate white stock. This little mishap might fancifully be regarded as symbolical of his moral state at the moment. He awaited something further from Mrs. Lockhart; but at length, as she did not

“speak, he said carefully, “Grant murdered! I cannot believe it! He parted from me not twelve hours ago in such capital health and spirits.” Then, after another pause, he bent forward and added in a grating whisper, as if confidentially, “the message that summoned me here mentioned the name of my son—Thomas. Pardon a father’s anxiety—alluding to him at such a moment. But . . . nothing wrong . . . eh?”

“Oh, Sir Francis! the surgeon says he cannot live; but he was very brave: it was while he was trying to protect Mr. Grant that he was struck. Oh, how can anyone be so wicked!”

A peculiar sound escaped from the baronet’s throat, and his upper lip drew slowly back so as to reveal the teeth. It seemed to Mrs. Lockhart as if he were laughing; but only a madman could laugh at such a juncture, and she trembled with horror. It was immediately evident, however, that Sir Francis was simply in the grip of a horror vastly greater than hers, and that it had momentarily mastered him. Presently his eyes rolled, his head swayed forward, and, had he not grasped the balusters, he would have fallen. But calling up all his energies, he commanded himself a little, and, without attempting to speak, began the ascent

of the stairs. Just then a door opened above, and Perdita's voice said in a hushed tone:

"Sir Francis, are you there?"

He stopped, and looked upward; then, still in silence, he mounted the remaining stairs with a laboured movement, and arrived, tremulous and panting, on the landing. Perdita was standing at the door of Philip's room. Her brows were drawn down, and her eyes, quick, dark, and bright, scrutinized the baronet with a troubled expression.

"Is he there?" the latter inquired.

"Who?" said Perdita reluctantly.

Sir Francis stared; then half lifted his hands and said: "I know about Grant: dead: can hardly believe it: left me last night in such health and spirits: but Tom . . . as Tom's my son . . . is he . . .?"

"You are too late!" said Perdita, glancing away from him as he spoke. "Poor Tom! he deserved something better."

"Let me go to him," said Sir Francis, moving forward with a groping gesture, like one walking in the dark. He pushed past Perdita and entered the room. She remained for a moment on the threshold, following him with her eyes, and seeming inclined to retire and leave *him*; but she ended by stepping within and closing the door after her.

Sir Francis, however, was now unconscious of everything except that which lay on the bed before him. Tom's hands rested beside him on the coverlet; his father lifted one of them, and let it fall again. He then sat down on the side of the bed, raised the upper part of the body and supported it on his arm, bending his face close to that of the dead boy, and giving vent at intervals, below his breath, to a kind of groaning sound, the most piteous that had ever fallen on Perdita's ears. She remained leaning against the door, with an air of painful contemplation.

After what seemed a long time, and was undoubtedly long if measured by its spiritual effects, the baronet's moanings gradually subsided into silence; the veins in his forehead, which had become swollen and dark with the accumulation of blood to the brain, returned to their normal state, and the man sat erect, gazing into vacancy, with a demeanour of pallid and stony immobility. Thought seemed to be at a standstill within him, and even the susceptibility to suffering had become torpid. He sat thus so long that at length Perdita's restless temperament could endure the pause no more, and she spoke.

"Leave him now, Sir Francis. I wish to tell you something."

He betrayed no sign of having heard her. By-and-by she advanced to the bed, and stood directly in front of him.

"What do you wish me to do with this?" she demanded, holding up the sealed enclosure which had accompanied Grant's letter.

"These are not business-hours," said Sir Francis sluggishly. "Tom and I are taking a holiday. Our work is done."

"His work is done, but not yours: you cannot have the privileges of death until you die," Perdita answered.

"I know more about death than you imagine," responded the baronet, in the same halting tone. "You needn't grudge me the privileges; I have the rest."

"I am sorry for you—sorrier than I should have thought I could be," said Perdita; "but there are some things which must be said between us: for my father is dead as well as your son; and since I can no longer learn from him, you must hear and answer me. Come, Sir Francis; I have always had my way with you in the end."

"No one has any weapons against me now; they're all here!" said the baronet, laying his finger on Tom's shoulder with the word.

"I mean to know the truth, however," returned

Perdita, with a resolution that sat strangely on her subtle and changeful beauty. "It was Tom himself, who told me the man who called himself Grant was my father: the rest is contained in this enclosure; shall I read it, or will you speak?"

"How came you by that?" inquired the baronet, for the first time fixing his eyes upon the packet in her hand.

"It was found, addressed to me, in the pocket of Charles Grantley's coat. But first, listen to this letter, which accompanied it."

"Not here!" said the other, lifting his hand. "Would you dishonour me in my boy's presence?"

"He knew enough to make him suspect you before he died."

Sir Francis shrank as if he had been stung. "Don't tell me that!" he exclaimed. "You may call me a robber and a murderer, if you like, and tell the world of it; I may have failed in everything else, but I kept my boy's confidence—he never doubted me a moment . . . did he?" At the last words his voice fell from passionate assertion to quavering entreaty.

"You are not much of a man," said Perdita coldly. "You should not be a villain if you fear to face the consequences and to stand alone. Tom was more manly than you; he despised you be-

cause you were afraid of Grantley, instead of crushing him, or, at least, defying him. And has no one suffered besides you?" she continued with rising fire. "See what you have made of me! If my father had been with me, to love me, and for me to love and honour, I should not have been what I am. You parted us—as I now believe, by a cowardly and slanderous falsehood. You brought me up to think the thoughts of a woman of the world and a libertine while I was still a child. You gave me nothing to care for but my own success—for money and power; and at last you married me to a worn-out formalist, whose very virtues made sin seem delightful. I have never had help or sympathy from a human soul, and that dead boy is the only creature who ever honestly loved me—and he would not have done it if he had known me! But, thanks to you, I can't even be sorry for my failings now; I know when I've been injured, though I can't feel the injury, and I mean to have what is due to me. I have believed all my life that my father was an embezzler and a scoundrel, a man whose name and connection were a disgrace: a millstone round my neck; some one whom I was to remember only to forget and deny—and now, when it is too late to be of any good to me, because I am too

old to change, and when he is dead, I am to find out that you, and not he, have been the villain! I have heard you whimpering over your boy, and I pitied you; but why should I pity you? Whom did you ever pity? If you had a glimmer of nobility left in you, you would be glad that he died before you were exposed and shamed. And you shall be exposed and shamed: I will do it! Here are your good name and prosperity, in this packet. Are you ready to see it published?" She held the packet at arm's length before his face; there was something almost appalling in the sparkle of her eyes and the bitter movement of her lips.

Sir Francis had listened to this harangue at first with a tremor of the nerves, as one who awaits the fall of a thunderbolt; then even the strength of fear seemed to lapse away, and he sat gazing at Perdita with a dull unresponsive countenance, while she kindled more and more with the story of her wrongs and resolve to retaliate. When she ended with her fierce question he said heavily, "Do what you like, my dear. You don't know all. I've struck myself a deadlier blow than you can strike me, with all the world at your back. Do what you like, and then . . . leave me alone

with my boy. He and I may laugh over this some day—who knows!”

Perdita looked at him curiously. “Sir Francis,” she said, “do you admit all these accusations? Remember, I haven’t read these letters; they are sealed still; I have no sure ground yet for my suspicions. For all I could prove, you may be innocent—unless these letters are the proof. Are they or not?”

“I suppose they are,” was his reply, in the same tone as before. “I don’t know what else they can be. Do what you like, my dear.”

“Well, we shall see,” said Perdita, after a pause. She turned and walked to the door and opened it. The door of Mr. Grant’s room, on the other side of the landing, was ajar, and Marion was visible within. Perdita beckoned to her. Marion probably supposed that the Marquise was going to inform her of Tom’s death, for she came forward at once with a face full of tender compassion and sympathy. The influences of the past night and morning had wrought an effect in Marion’s nature and aspect like the blossoming-out of a flower whose delicate freshness had heretofore been veiled within a rough calyx. Such changes are scarcely to be described in set terms, belonging, as they do, rather to the spirit than to the

body ; the outward signs seemed limited to a certain ennobling of the forms and movements of the face, a soft shining of the voice. The imperious flush and angry preoccupation of Perdita's countenance, while they emphasized her beauty, put her on a level of attractiveness inferior to Marion's at this moment, despite the latter's comparative plainness.

"Can anything be done to help?" Marion asked, as she came in. But as soon as she caught sight of Sir Francis she paused and murmured, "Ah, poor soul! I wish I could comfort him."

"He seems resigned," said Perdita ungently. "Death alters us all, Marion, whether we die or survive. I am resigned, too ; though my lover is dead in this room, and my father in that!"

"Mr. Grant . . ."

"Yes, Mr. Grant—Charles Grantley, my father ; who was accused of high crimes and misdemeanours, and driven into exile, and who came back to England to see his daughter and be murdered by a footpad. You were fond of him, were you not?"

"Whoever he was, he committed no crime," said Marion loftily.

"Why, so I think. But up to this time it has been made to appear otherwise. If he was not guilty, he has been greatly wronged, has he not?"

Marion seemed about to answer impetuously; but her eyes fell upon Sir Francis, and she compressed her lips and was silent.

"He has been a by-word of contempt and dishonour for twenty years," Perdita continued, "and now he has died with the stain still upon him. If he was innocent, that seems a pity, doesn't it? I am his daughter, and my honour is involved in his. You had a father; what would you have done in my place?"

"I would have found the proof of his innocence, if it was in the world."

"Well, and what then?"

"I should be content . . . I hope."

"I am not content!" exclaimed Perdita. "What use is the proof, unless to give him back his honourable name, and to punish the man who betrayed him? I have some letters sealed up here that will do all that, I think; and Sir Francis Bendibow must be content to hear them read, and . . ."

"Do not do it, Perdita," interposed Marion,

in a low but urgent voice. "His heart is broken already."

"What is that to me?" the other returned. "His broken heart will not mend my father's good name."

"Your father is dead," said Marion, "and you would kill him again if you do not let his spirit live in you. Why should you reveal the secret that he kept all his life? If he chose to suffer unjustly, it was because he was too noble to vindicate himself. He bequeaths his nobility to you; and you should spare his enemies, since he spared them."

"This is a practical world," Perdita remarked, with an odd smile; "I'm afraid it would misinterpret such refined generosity. However, your idea is interesting and original; I've a mind to adopt it. It would be amusing, for once, to mount a moral pedestal above one's friends. But I can't make an angel of myself in a moment; I shall give this packet to you to keep for me: if I were to read the contents I should never be able to hold my tongue. Here—take it quickly before my pedestal crumbles! Well, Sir Francis, I wish you joy; you are an honest man again!"

"If I had not been sure your father was

innocent, I should know it now," said Marion. "Wicked men do not have such daughters."

"Thank you, my dear; you must let me kiss you for that; though my virtue is not my own, but yours. Now take me into the other room; I wish to see my father before I go."

Marion accompanied her to the chamber where Charles Grantley lay, and would have left her at the threshold, but Perdita kept fast hold of her hand, and drew her in. They stood beside the bed, and looked down at the quiet face.

"What are hardships?" said Perdita, after a while. "Are they what happens to us, or what we create in ourselves? He seems at peace. Hardships are hard hearts. Good-bye, father. After all . . . you might have kept your daughter with you!"

After giving some directions about the body, she departed. But Sir Francis still remained in Lancaster's chamber, with his son in his arms. Their holiday was not over.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN a man is dying, or just dead, it often seems, to those interested in the matter, that he is taken off prematurely; that he leaves his life uncompleted; that his usefulness was not at an end; that he and those who were bound to him would have been the better had he survived. Death seems like a violence, a robbery, a wrong; and all the more wrongful a robbery, because we are powerless to resist it or to punish it. The mother who mourns her infant, the lover who looks on the dead face of his mistress, the child who feels a dim horror at the unresponsive coldness of the hand whose every touch was love, the friend who sees the horizon of his own life darken and his pathway narrow at the grave of his friend—to these it seems that an injury had been inflicted upon them, the traces of which no compensation can remove.

And yet, as the mind moves forward through the succession of moods and events that is called time, how speedily this wound of loss is healed!

Not those who nurse their grief the longest are always the ones who loved most generously and whole-heartedly. Often there is more love of the departed in those who refuse to be comforted. By-and-by, as we journey on along the road of mortal existence, meeting at every step fresh scenery and new thoughts and demands for action, and knowing that for us there is no retreating, no pausing even—only, at most, a profitless glance backward at scenes and occurrences whose sole reality now is in the growth or decay which they have wrought in our own souls—by-and-by we begin to discover that the dead have not been left behind; that, in such measure as we truly loved them, in that measure are they with us still, walking hand in hand with us, or shining as guides of our forecasting thoughts, and strengthening our hearts in dreams and secret musings. Death, which seems so arbitrary and reckless, is vindicated by our wiser and calmer judgment. The mortal life that seemed cut short, is seen to have lasted out its fitting span; more years would have been more evil and less good, more weariness and less use. Suddenness is predicable only of material things; in the processes and passions of the spirit there is at all times just proportion and equable

movement. It is outside the domain of accidents and violence.

As regards Charles Grantley's death, there was not, it may be surmised, any wide necessity to preach resignation. His acquaintances were not many; his friends few indeed. To the majority even of those who knew him, his true name and antecedents were unknown. The mystery and ambiguity which had attached to him were scarcely likely to increase his popularity; and probably the only thing that could have drawn anything like general attention to his end was the fact of its being a murder. But murders and robberies were not so rare in the London environs then as they are now; at all events, they excited less remark; a highwayman was still a difficulty to be reckoned with by belated travellers; and, moreover, men's minds had become more or less callous to the idea of bloodshed and violence, after so many years of wars and outrage. Accordingly, Mr. Grantley's funeral was but thinly attended, comprising few or none beyond the indispensable churchyard officials and the immediate personages of the present history. From the number of the latter, indeed, Sir Francis Bendibow must be subtracted. Another funeral took place on the same day, in which he may be supposed to have felt

an even greater interest; and yet he was absent even from that. The fact is, the unfortunate baronet's mind had received a shock which prevented him from clearly apprehending the full extent of the calamity which had caused it. The notion that he and his son were enjoying a holiday together, and were not to be disturbed, seemed the most inveterate of his delusions, as it had been his first. Possibly it was not so much positive mania in him, as the uncontrollable shrinking of his soul from the horror of the truth; analogous to the instinct which makes us turn away our eyes from a too-revolting spectacle. Feeling that to confront and realise the facts would overturn his reason, he abandoned reason in the effort to preserve it. But all the while, in some remote recess of his mind, veiled even from himself, must have lurked the fatal knowledge which he strove to escape. It was there, like a relentless and patient enemy, lying in wait for him, and sure to spring forth and throttle him at last. Else wherefore was there that furtive gleam of terror in the baronet's sunken and heavy-lidded eyes? Why did he sigh so deeply and so piteously? What was the reason of those long fits of musing, during which his face worked so strangely, and his lips grew so white and dry? Why did he so

anxiously shun the sound of whatever might imply the truth? No; if this were madness, it was the madness of concealment, not of ignorance. Only a gleam of sanity could render him truly insane.

Be that as it may, it became known that the late events had compelled Sir Francis to retire temporarily from society, and from the conduct of his business; and much sympathy was expressed on all sides for the unhappy gentleman; and grave speculations were indulged in as to the probable future of the Bank, in case his retirement should be prolonged. Not readily were to be found business aptitudes and experience comparable to his. Moreover, the times were hard just at present; and although the Bank's credit was now, as at all times, unexceptionable, yet even the Bank was but a human institution, and all human institutions partake of human perishableness. It was impossible to be too prudent, when, as now, empires might change hands or vanish at any moment. Finance is not a matter of sentiment; and though it is always agreeable to have business relations with a man who is at once aristocratic and charming, yet when the personage in question is represented only through his clerks, such considerations are in abeyance. Thus it happened that a good many clients of the famous Bank of Bendibow Brothers

withdrew their deposits and placed them elsewhere; and the world went on.

Meanwhile the murderer of the old East Indian remained at large, the police being unable to form any trustworthy idea as to who or where he was. At the inquest, everybody who could be conceived to have any connection with the case (including the baker who lent Miss Lockhart his waggon, and the ostler of the "Plough and Harrow," who entertained Mr. Thomas Bendibow on the last evening of his life) was strictly examined; and though several of them proffered a vast deal of information, little or none of it had much to do with the matter to be elucidated. The last highwayman who had been known to infest the vicinity in which the murder took place, had been captured and safely hanged some time before; and this new aspirant for the slip-knot evidently meant to prolong his career for a while longer. His present venture must have been a disappointment to him; for it was shown that the deceased had not been robbed (doubtless on account of the unexpected arrival of succour); and, even had the succour not arrived, no robbery worthy of the name could have taken place, inasmuch as the deceased had little or no money in his pockets; nothing, in fact, but a packet of old letters which were of no interest to

anybody, and to a highwayman least of all. The jury returned a verdict of "met his death at the hands of some person or persons unknown;" and the world went on.

But the seed of that flower of love that had been planted in the soil of Charles Grantley's grave took root, and grew, and blossomed; and it bade fair to be as sweet and wholesome a flower as ever such seed produced. Marion and Philip, looking into their future, could see nothing but brightness there, all the brighter by contrast with the tender shadow of sadness out of which they looked. Nothing but good, they believed, could come from a union begun at such a time, and with such a consecration. The influence of Grantley was with them, with almost the vividness, at times, of a spiritual presence; and they insensibly spoke and acted on a higher and purer plan than they would have done had he not lived and died. If his mourners were few, few men have been more tenderly mourned; and to Marion especially was his memory dear and reverend, by reason of the cloud that had overhung so large a portion of his life. That cloud, to her apprehension, had now become all illuminated with heavenly gold; and she felt as little need to confirm her faith by an examination of the packet left in her care, as to ask

Philip for proof of her love for him. Marion was enthusiastic and imperious in her faiths even more than in her scepticisms. But, indeed, her whole nature was, for the time, sweetened, subdued, and yet ardently developed. The strangeness and harshness which had occasionally characterised her in the past, was now no longer noticeable; her moods were equal, her heart was happy and active. It seemed as if nothing could obscure her serenity; and yet a woman in her condition is peculiarly liable to tragic or chilling accidents. The delicate and sensitive petals of the soul, expanding thus freely to the unaccustomed air, are never so susceptible as now to blight and injury, albeit it is from one source only that the harm can come. Let the lover walk heedfully at this period of his career, nor even grasp his treasure too firmly, lest unawares it vanish from his hand, or be transformed into something hostile.

The reading of Mr. Grantley's will was, for various reasons, postponed until about a week after his funeral. Merton Fillmore, who had charge of it, had sent a communication to the Marquise Desmoines to be present on the occasion; but she, after some delay, finally let it be known that she declined the invitation, observing that she had but the slightest acquaintance with the gentleman who

called himself Grant or Grantley, and that it was impossible to suppose that she could have any interest in the disposition of his property; from which it may be inferred that she had made up her mind to ignore, ostensibly if not also from conviction, his pretensions to relationship with her. Upon receiving her letter, Fillmore stroked his chin with a slight, ambiguous smile, and forthwith took measures to convene the meeting at Mrs. Lockhart's house on the following morning at twelve o'clock.

Now, it so happened that Philip had, the evening previous, received a note from his publisher in the city, requesting his presence at the office betimes the next day. For Philip's labours during the last few months had resulted in the production of a poem, more ambitious in design and larger in scope than anything he had heretofore attempted. His earlier writings, indeed, had been chiefly lyrical in character, and had been rather indicative of poetical moods and temperament in the author than of those unmistakable gifts of seeing, feeling, and creating that belong to poets by divine right. He had made good his claims to be ranked among the aristocracy of genius—possibly among those whose place is near the throne; but he had as yet put forward no serious pretensions to wear the

royal crown on his own brows. The present work, which bore the title of "Iduna," seems to have been a semi-mystical composition, cast in a more or less dramatic form, and aiming to portray the conflict which is to some extent going on in every human heart, between the love that consults and indulges selfish interests or impulses, and that nobler and purer love which strikes through the mortal and temporary symbol to the divine and eternal reality. To illustrate this theme, Philip had imagined a wild, sea-beaten kingdom, situated somewhere in the unexplored ocean of time; a rocky vision of a royal castle, and living there a warrior king, grim, whose beard drifts like the snow blown from the mountain-top across the sky. To him was born Iduna, glorious in beauty, untamable in spirit, dowered from her infancy with mysterious and half-supernatural gifts. For, once, when little more than a baby, she had wandered alone from the castle, and down to the misty reaches of the wave-beaten shore. What happened to her there was never known; but round her neck was hung a broad necklace, wrought with more than human skill of workmanship, of unknown shells and precious stones and links of virgin gold. The necklace was endowed with talismanic attributes, conferring on the grim king's daughter miraculous powers

and the lustre of a goddess; and it was whispered among the people that it was the gift of some mighty spirit of the sea, some ocean demi-god, who had met the little princess on the shore, and who, if she remained true to the sublimity of her fate, would one day claim her for his bride. But woe to her should the magic necklace be lost or yielded up! At these foolish fancies the grim king laughed and tossed his beard; but, as Iduna grew in stature and in the splendour of her beauty, men said that for such as she no merely human destiny was meet; and when, at certain seasons, the sea thundered more resoundingly along the coast, and the wreaths of foam were swept by the fierce breeze past the castle battlements, Iduna would mount her horse and ride forth as if she heard the voice of her godlike lover calling to her in the gale, and saw his form moving towards her over the tumultuous crests of the ocean billows; though to other eyes than hers he would appear but as a pillar of gleaming mist, a stalely phantom of the storm, half seen, half imagined. At these superstitions the grim king frowned and swore by his beard that the girl should learn—and that ere long—the sufficient worth of a mortal bridegroom.

Of this earthly love; of the loss of the magic

necklace, and with it the protection of the sea-god; of Iduna's imprisonment in the castle; of her final recovery of her talisman by the self-sacrificing agency of him whose happiness depended upon withholding it from her: and of her escape from the castle: of these things no more than a hint can be given. Seaward she rode, and the storm came up to meet her. But the tidings of her flight came to the king, and he mounted his war-horse and thundered with all his knights in pursuit. Wilder grew the storm; the heavens were darkened, and seemed to stoop to the earth; strange sounds, as of the fierce mutterings and laughter of viewless spirits, filled the air. Yet still the grim king rode on, and, filled with grisly forebodings, his knights pressed after him in silence. Then the blast shrieked madly in their ears; the earth rocked and shuddered; ghastly lights flickered along the blackness of the sky; and the sea, gathering itself together in a thunder-smitten battlement of toppling surges, swept forward on the land. Yet, ere it engulfed them for ever, they saw by the glimmer of phantom fires the form of Iduna flying far before them, her black hair floating backward on the hurricane, and the magic necklace flashing round her neck. And even as the waters smote them, a godlike apparition seemed to emerge resplendent and se-

rene from the midmost heart of the tempest: towards him Iduna stretched her arms, and was folded to his breast.

When the sun rose again, castle and kingdom, knights and king, had vanished, and the gray sea rolled its murmuring billows fathoms overhead. But tradition tells that in the night, after the princess had gone forth, the lover who had liberated her to his own dear cost, mounted to the topmost turred and gazed seaward, and, as the destroying wave came towering towards him through the roar and terror of the darkness, he saw, riding with it on its awful crest, two beings of superhuman beauty and grandeur. As they drew near him, he bowed his head, trembling; but his heart seemed to hear a voice that was like Iduna's, murmuring his name, and her soft fingers touched his cheek. He seemed to be gathered up out of himself, and to move beside her; the tempest was still; they were together and alone, and the morning broke.

Such, in bare prose, is the outline of the poem to the making of which Philip had brought his best talents and energies, and on the merits of which he had been fain to stake his fame. Being done, however, and in the printers' hands, he had lost heart about it; felt that it was cold and in-

adequate, and regretted that he had not been wise enough to have kept it for ten years, and then destroyed it. Accordingly his publisher's summons, coming as it did within a fortnight of the time the book appeared, failed to kindle in him any pleasurable anticipations; and on his way to the City he pretty well made up his mind to abandon poetry as a profession, and take to something else. It was all very well to amuse one's self with such vanities while one is a boy, but now that he was about to take to himself a wife, Philip felt that he ought to adopt some more remunerative calling. He presented himself at the office, with a very grave face, about ten o'clock.

The publisher bowed, and begged Mr. Lancaster to be seated. "I should have had the honour to wait upon you at your own residence, sir," he said, "but as it was desirable to have your signature to some receipts, and for other business reasons, I took the liberty—er—well! Now, Mr. Lancaster, I don't know what your expectations were; it was only natural that they should have been great; so were mine; but, to tell you the truth . . . however, judge for yourself." And he handed him a paper, on which was a brief statement of accounts. "We have been on the market only ten days last Wednesday," added the pub-

lisher, "and I call the results thus far fair—fair! Sir, they deserved to be; but I doubt not we shall do better yet."

"What is this about?" inquired Philip, who had been staring at the paper. "What does this entry of eleven hundred and fifty pounds mean?"

"Your profits on the percentage, as agreed upon," answered the publisher. "We published at ten and sixpence, you know."

"Oh . . . I see!" said Philip quietly. His heart heaved and he knew not whether he were more likely to burst into a storm of tears or a shout of laughter. "That seems to me very good indeed," he compelled himself to add. Didn't expect the half of it."

"Genius like yours, sir, may expect anything—and get it!" said the publisher, sententiously. "There is no poet before you, Mr. Lancaster, to-day—not one! Do you care to take the cheque with you now, or . . ."

"I suppose I may as well," said Philip.

Some transactions were gone through with; Philip never remembered what they were. At last he found himself, as if by magic, at the door of the house in Hammersmith, with eleven hundred and fifty pounds in his pocket. He threw open the door of the sitting-room and strode in.

He had forgotten all about the reading of the will. There was Mr. Fillmore, with the document in his hand, just reading out the words—"I give and bequeath to Marion Lockhart;" and there was Marion, with a startled and troubled look in her eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE words which Philip had heard, and the shock of surprise which they gave him, combined with the unexpectedness of the whole scene in Mrs. Lockhart's little sitting-room, rendered obscure his perception of what immediately followed. By-and-by, however, two or three of the persons present took their departure, and then Philip found himself alone with Fillmore, Mrs. Lockhart, and Marion. The latter had already received the congratulations of the company, to which she had replied little or nothing.

"My dear daughter," now exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart, with gentle fervour, "what a splendid surprise! To think I should have lived to see you

a great heiress! Twenty thousand pounds did you say, Mr. Fillmore? To think of Mr. Grant's—Mr. Grantley's having been so rich! He was so quiet and simple. What a noble thing to do! But he was the son of Tom Grantley, you know, and Lady Edith Seabridge was his mother. And, oh! Philip, how happy you and Marion will be now!"

"I think we should have been that, at any rate," said Philip, smiling at Marion, and conscious of eleven hundred pounds in his pocket.

"Yes; at least as happy," said Marion, in a low voice.

"I had not been aware," observed Fillmore, with a slight bow, "that Mr. Lancaster was to be congratulated as well as Miss Lockhart."

"You can bear witness that I was not a fortune-hunter," said Philip, laughing. "When was this will made, Mr. Fillmore?"

"Very recently," he replied, mentioning the date.

"Strange!" said Philip, musing. "He was as sound and healthy a man of his age as ever I saw. Had he any premonition of death?"

"Apparently he had not," the lawyer answered. "But, as you would have learned, had you been present throughout the reading of the

document, the will provided for the probable contingency of his continuing to live. In that case, Miss Lockhart would have come into possession of ten thousand pounds on her next birthday, and the remainder of the legacy hereafter. Mr. Grantley evidently intended her to reap the benefits of his wealth without having to wait for his decease."

"I wish he had told me!" murmured Marion, folding her hands on her lap and looking out of the window.

"Madame Desmoines was not here?" remarked Philip.

"I have had some correspondence with her on the subject," said Fillmore. "As it happens, she was not named as a legatee in the will. But, had it been otherwise, I gathered that it was not her purpose to accept anything."

"Why so?" Philip asked.

"I was not informed; but it may be presumed that the will would have designated her as the testator's daughter, and she was perhaps not prepared to acknowledge the relationship."

"Oh, Mr. Fillmore, do you think Madame Desmoines could have any doubts of Mr. Grantley's honour?" exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart. "I'm

sure she has too fine a character herself to think evil of others."

"I should not explain her action on that ground—were I to attempt to explain it," Fillmore answered. "The Marquise Desmoines is not an ordinary woman; she is very far from it. No direct proof, beyond the testator's confidential statement to certain persons, has ever been advanced as to his identity with the Charles Grantley who disappeared a score of years ago. Had the Marquise adopted that statement, it might have involved inconvenient or painful explanations with persons still living, which, under the circumstances, the Marquise would have been anxious to avoid. I mention no names, and need not do so. On the other hand, she is the owner of a property from her late husband which is in excess of her ordinary requirements. She desires no addition to it, and may have been unwilling to seem to interfere with the advantage of others."

"How could that be?" demanded Philip. "If Mr. Grantley had bequeathed money to her, it would have made no difference whether she acknowledged him or not."

"We cannot be certain of that," the lawyer replied. "It constantly happens that legacies are, for some reason or other, refused, or become in

some manner inoperative ; and in such cases there is generally an alternative—sometimes more than one—provided in codicils. There is no reason to suppose that Mr. Grantley would have failed to foresee such a contingency, and to provide against it ; especially in view of the somewhat exceptional position that he was conscious of occupying.”

“That is to say, if he had left his money to Madame Desmoines, and she had refused it, you think he would have provided beforehand that it should go to somebody else ?” said Philip.

“I think we have no reason to suppose otherwise,” returned the other, with the lawyer’s prudence of phrase. “And it may have been in order to facilitate her refusal, had the alternative presented itself, that she acted in anticipation.”

“I was sure she would do what she considered right,” said Mrs. Lockhart, who had not in the least comprehended Fillmore’s analysis, but had inferred from his tone and manner that he was in some way defending Perdita from an aspersion.

“She possesses many qualities not commonly found in women,” remarked Fillmore, looking down at his hands meditatively. After a little he rose, as for departure. Philip was just then saying something to Mrs. Lockhart ; and as Marion also

rose, she and the lawyer were for a moment by themselves.

"Mr. Fillmore," she said, colouring as she spoke, and lowering her voice as if she intended her words for him only, "didn't you say that legatees often refused their legacies?"

"All sorts of strange things occur, in law as well as elsewhere, Miss Lockhart."

"Why should anyone refuse a legacy?"

"For no very wise reason, perhaps," said he, smiling slightly. "From what are called conscientious motives, sometimes; or quite as often from enmity, or whim or . . . But I dare say you can imagine as many reasons as I."

"Yes," said Marion absently; and then she added, "So that is why codicils are put in wills?"

"Such provisions are sometimes inserted in codicils," said Fillmore, after one of his characteristic pauses, and a fixed glance at Marion.

"Are there any codicils in Mr. Grantley's will?" was her next question.

"A codicil, inserted to provide against the miscarriage of something in the body of the will, remains, of course, inoperative and therefore practically non-existent, if the miscarriage in question does not occur," replied he carelessly. Before she could answer he added, "I have over-stayed my

time. Farewell, for the present, Miss Lockhart; I trust you may long enjoy the means of happiness and variety afforded you. Mrs. Lockhart, I wish you good-day; Mr. Lancaster, your obedient servant."

"I suppose this business won't be settled for some time to come," observed Marion, following him to the door. "I suppose I should have an opportunity of communicating with you beforehand, if I should wish it?"

"I shall always be at your disposal," returned Fillmore, bowing; and declining Mrs. Lockhart's invitation to remain to dinner, he left the house without further parley.

"Oh, my dear daughter," cried Mrs. Lockhart, in her overflowing way, when the three were again alone, "what do you think? Philip has his news, too; he is an heir, if you are an heiress; all our good fortune comes at once!"

"You, too? How?" said Marion, appearing to be much moved, and turning upon Philip with a face full of a sort of serious excitement.

"Not much in comparison with yours; we shall never be equals in that respect, I'm afraid," returned Philip, smiling. "But that poem of mine, which I wouldn't let you read, because I didn't think it good enough for you, seems to have been

good enough for other people. My publisher has sold enough of it, at last accounts, to bring me in more than a thousand pounds of profit. If it would only go on at that rate, I should do very well."

Marion looked deeply delighted, and at the same time agitated. "Huzza! Philip, I knew you must be a genius!" she exclaimed. "Of course it will go on—how can you help writing better and better. That is much better than inheriting other people's money, which you don't deserve, and which doesn't really belong to you—not even so much as to other people. A thousand pounds in such a short time! We shall not need Mr. Grantley's money at all."

"Oh, you may find it useful to buy your bonnets and shawls with," said Philip, laughing.

But Marion seemed not to hear him. She paced about the room, stopping now and then and humming some air to herself; and, finally, she seated herself at the piano and began to improvise, striking melodious and changing chords, sometimes soft and tender, sometimes resonant and tumultuous. Philip, who was more stirred and influenced by music than by almost anything else, especially by the kind of irregular and mysterious music that Marion was given to producing, sat near her, with his head on his hands, letting

the harmonies sway and kindle his thoughts. When, at length, the music ceased, and Philip raised his head, he perceived that he and she were alone; Mrs. Lockhart had gone out.

"I shall always be a poet, as long as I have you to play to me," said he. "Only, I shall never write such poetry as I think of while you play."

"It does not take much to make two people happy, does it?" she said.

"Very little: only love, the rarest thing in the world; and music, the next rarest; and a few other trifling matters of that sort," returned he, with superb irony.

"Ah, my dear love, you know what I mean. All we need to be happy is each other, and what we can do for each other. Nothing else, except something to eat and drink, and a room to live in. I'm sure I've been happier in this house, with you, and with only money enough to keep alive on, than I ever was before, or expected to be."

"Well, I have a theory about that," said Philip, "though I've never worked it out. Love in a cottage is a good thing; and so is love in a palace. But love is not always of one quality; in fact, it never is the same in any two human beings. Sometimes it is simple and quiet and primitive; and then a cottage is the place for it; because, if

we are to be at ease and content, what is outside of us ought to correspond to what is within, as the body to the spirit. But sometimes love is splendid, royal, full of every kind of spiritual richness and variety, continually rising to new heights of vision, plunging into new depths of insight, creating, increasing, living in wider and wider spheres of thought and feeling. And, for such love as that, a cottage is not the right environment. You must have a palace, a fortune, splendour, and power; indeed, nothing can be too splendid, or splendid enough."

"And could not such a love be happy without all that splendour?"

"Well, no—according to the theory! But as I said, I haven't completely worked it out yet. There is a certain kind of happiness, no doubt, in doing without what you know you ought to have; and, as a matter of fact, few or no people ever get just the surroundings they want, or ever are or expect to be entirely happy; and, perhaps, to be paradoxical, they wouldn't be happy if they were. Imagination is a great factor in the account, and hope. The material world is too rigid and heavy ever to obey the behests of those two magicians; and so their best work has always been done in cloudland and dreamland. Perhaps in the

next world, nature—this phantasmagory of earth, sea, and sky—will not be fixed and unchangeable as here, but pliant and adaptable to one thought and will: so that the statue which I see in my mind shall at once clothe itself in spiritual marble before my eyes! and the rocky island, which I imagine in yonder azure sea, shall straightway rise from the waves in all its tropic beauty; and yet all this be not a dream or a fancy, but a reality as real and immortal as my own mind—which, after all, is the only reality. Reality has nothing to do with fixedness. Your lips of flesh and blood, my beloved Marion, are not so real as the kisses I give them, or as the love that goes into the kisses. Well—what were we talking about?”

“About whether twenty thousand pounds were necessary to make us happy.”

“Oh, was that it? Then we can take our time; for, as we have got the money—at least, since you’ve got it—we can settle the problem in the most satisfactory of all ways—by practical experiment! And that will take us a life-time at least.”

“Then, what if we found we had tried the wrong experiment, after all?”

“Well, I suppose all discoverers run that risk.

Meanwhile, it seems to me, 'tis better to have the money to lose than to win."

"I'm not sure about that," said Marion. "Money gives us power in the world, but 'tis only the money we earn that gives us a right to the power. Inheriting money is a sort of robbery. The power we have is not our own—we have usurped it. It brings a host of things crowding about us—things to be done, business to be attended to, claims to be considered: things that we do not care about, and that do us no good; that prevent us from feeling and thinking what we really care about. If one is born rich, it may be different; but to become suddenly rich without any help of one's own cannot be good, Philip. It must take away more than it gives; and what it takes away must be better than what it gives."

"But some people must be rich," said Philip. "Providence has so decreed. And why should it not be just as much the will of Providence that you should inherit riches as that you should be born to them or earn them? At all events, you have got it, and must make the best of it. Besides, there have been bigger fortunes in the world than twenty thousand pounds, as well as people who needed it more."

"Do you love me any better than you did before you knew of this?"

"Knowing it has not made me love you more—if that's what you mean; but the longer I know you the more I love you, so I love you now more than I did an hour ago."

"Should you love me any the less if this money turned out to belong to someone else?"

"No, foolish Marion; by this kiss, it wouldn't make an atom of difference."

"Oh, Philip, I hope it is so," said Marion, her bosom beginning to heave and her voice to falter. "I hate this money, and have been miserable ever since I had it! It does not belong to me, and I have made up my mind that I won't keep it."

"Not belong to you, Marion?"

"It belongs to Perdita; she was his daughter. Why should he have come back to England, unless because he hoped to find her, and to make her rich and happy? What have I to do with his fortune? I loved him almost like a father; and he used to say I was a daughter to him; but I am not his daughter as Perdita is, and the thought of having what she would have had is hateful! And it spoils my memory of him: I must think of him now as a man who left me a fortune—not as a

dear friend who gave me all the treasure of his wisdom and gentleness. He should not have done it; he doubted himself whether to do it, for he said something to me once which I did not understand then, but now I know he was trying to find out whether I would consent to such a thing. It is all wrong; and the only thing to be done now is to give it back."

"To whom?" asked Philip, who was trying not to feel too much amazed.

"To Perdita; for I know that, when I refuse it, it will go to her. There is a codicil in the will that gives it to her. I am sure of it, Philip, for I spoke to Mr. Fillmore, and I could see in his face and in the way he spoke that there is a codicil; and the reason he didn't read it was that I had not yet refused the legacy."

"But even if there be a codicil, how do you know it is in favour of Perdita?"

"It will turn out to be so," said Marion, shutting her lips and paling. She was watching Philip's face with an anxiety that seemed to penetrate to his very soul; it was evidently of supreme importance to her which side his judgment turned. He felt it, and strove to be calm, but the silent strength of her desire flowed against

him in a current more nearly irresistible than her words.

"Are you quite sure, Marion," he said, at length, "that you have told me all the reasons for your wishing to do this thing?"

Her cheeks slowly reddened as she replied in a whisper, "I have said all I can."

Their eyes met. "If you don't quite trust me now," said he, with a smile, half grave, half humorous, "perhaps you'll come to it when you've had your way. My darling, you may throw the money into the Thames, as far as I am concerned. If you wish to be rid of it, 'tis right you should be. If it were left to me, I should probably resign myself to keeping it; as it is, 'tis better out of the way. I'll see if I can't write you a greater fortune than that. Meanwhile, you must kiss me!"

Philip had no cause, on that day at least, to regret his surrender. "You see, sir," said Marion mischievously, after some such fathomless spell of happiness as only lovers can feel, "if I had kept the twenty thousand pounds, you could not have had this!"

"I may be glad you had them to refuse, at any rate," responded Philip.

CHAPTER VII.

THE most natural sequel to a mutual understanding, such as this between the two lovers, would be that they should get married with the least possible delay ; and as a matter of fact, that is what happened. The legacy having been handed back at Marion's instance and with Philip's consent, Marion would hardly be justified in opposing any unreasonable delay to the personal claims of so obedient a lover. It is not every man, however much in love he may be, who will surrender twenty thousand pounds without a murmur. But Philip, in the first place, was not of a specially avaricious disposition; and the unexpected success of his poem had impressed him with a belief in the pecuniary possibilities of a literary career, such as rendered him comparatively indifferent to extraneous resources. Beyond this, however, he had the insight to discern that the fundamental motive of Marion's action had not transpired in her argument. What really moved her was some

lurking tinge of jealousy with regard to the past relations between himself and Perdita. What basis there may have been for such jealousy, if there were any basis for it, Philip may have known; but he had always avoided any reference to it, and he probably did not care to risk the opening of the subject which would be likely to follow Marion's enforced acceptance of the legacy. Marion would never be happy under the persuasion that she was in possession of money which, in the natural course of things, should have gone to Perdita. Philip, therefore, capitulated with less parley than he might otherwise have attempted.

They were married in the course of three or four weeks, and went to spend their honeymoon on the Continent; the chief goal of their pilgrimage being the field of Waterloo, where Marion saw her father's grave. There was no drawback to the enjoyment of the journey; it was a period of serene and profound happiness on which it would be pleasant to dwell at more length. But happiness has few events, nor any apparent movement; it is like a chapter from eternity, which is the infinite development of the present moment. Time loses its semblance of reality, and the discovery that it does, nevertheless, continue to pass, comes as a surprise. The time arrived when Mr. and

Mrs. Lancaster were constrained to set their faces homeward: but they did so with unshadowed hearts. Life had begun for them with the sweetest auspices, and there seemed no reason to anticipate that it would not proceed to still brighter issues.

The home of the newly-wedded couple was to be, for the present, in the old house in Hammer-smith, which, with some alterations in the way of furniture, would be commodious enough, and which was endeared by association to Marion and her mother, and to Philip also as being the place where he had first met his bride. It was now the "little season" in London; Parliament was to sit early, and the town was rapidly filling up. The excitement of war being over, everyone was set upon getting the largest possible amount of excitement out of society, and the next few months promised to be brilliant ones. Among the literary celebrities of the day, no man's reputation stood higher at this moment than that of Philip Lancaster. He was mentioned in the same breath with Byron and Shelley, and there were not wanting persons who professed to find in him qualities quite equal to those of the latter poets. It was rumoured, also, that his personal advantages were on a par with his mental ones; that he had married a great heiress; that he was the younger

son of an earl ; that his past career had been distinguished by many romantic and mysterious episodes, involving the reputation of more than a few personages of rank both in England and on the Continent ; together with a score of other reports, true, half-true and untrue, such as invariably herald the appearance in prominent position of anyone whom nobody ever heard of before.

It was the custom at this period for men and women who happened to have achieved distinction either by their brains or by some equally uncommon means, to be invited to entertainments at the house of Lady Flanders. To be seen there conferred the insignia of a kind of nobility which had nothing to do with the peerage, but which was, perhaps, scarcely the less valued by the recipients of it. Accordingly it was not without satisfaction that Philip, a few days after his return to Hammersmith, received a communication from her ladyship, conveying her compliments, and an urgent desire to have the honour of welcoming the author of "Iduna" at her abode on the following Wednesday evening, at seven o'clock. Mrs. Lancaster was included in the invitation (not an invariable corollary in similar cases); and, indeed her ladyship's carriage had left cards the day be-

fore Philip's return from abroad, as Mrs. Lockhart testified.

Of course, they could have no hesitation in availing themselves of the first social recognition, in the capital of the world, of Philip's genius; and Marion prepared herself for the occasion with a sentiment of wifely pride at the thought that the world should so soon confirm that opinion of her husband which she herself had more or less avowedly entertained ever since the first moment she beheld him. The young people attired themselves in a manner which would excite less remark in the present day than it might have done ten or twenty years ago, but which, at all events, at the period we write of, was altogether in the mode. Shortly before the carriage was announced, Marion, being ready, went downstairs, and saw lying on the hall table a letter addressed to Philip Lancaster, Esquire, in Mr. Fillmore's handwriting. Now, Marion had a day or two before written to Fillmore, inquiring whether there were any formalities to be observed in relation to her rejection of the legacy; and she took it for granted that this letter, although addressed to her husband, was the answer to her question. She and Philip had not as yet had occasion to come to any understanding as to their liberty to open each

other's letters; and, though Marion would probably, in an ordinary case, have let the letter alone, in this instance she had no hesitation in appropriating it. But at this juncture Mrs. Lockhart came into the hall and detected something about Marion's dress that needed readjustment. Marion put the letter in her pocket and forgot all about it.

They arrived safely at their destination, and were ushered into the presence of their hostess, an immensely tall old lady, with a turban, overhanging eyebrows, and a prominent chin. She was of noble descent, and was now recognised as among the most eminent encouragers of literature and the liberal arts; but there were terrible stories told about her youth, when she was said to have travelled in Europe in male attire, to have fought a duel and killed her man, and to have lived several years in some part of Asia under circumstances known only to herself. At this stage of her career, she was a great card-player, sternly religious in the way of forms and etiquette, and reputed to have one of the wittiest and sharpest tongues in London. To Philip she contented herself with saying: "Young gentleman, I used to know your grand-uncle. He was not so handsome a man as you. 'Tis a dangerous thing, sir, to be handsome and to write poetry. People who see

you will expect your poetry to be as well as you are, and, and, if they find it is not, they'll call you both humbugs. I haven't read your poem, Mr. Lancaster, but now that I have seen you I mean to, and then I shall tell you just what I think of it! Mrs. Lancaster, I like you better than your husband; he's not good enough for you, though he'll try and make you believe the contrary. Never let him print anything that you don't like—else he'll make a failure. There—run along now and enjoy yourselves, and you may come here again as often as you like."

The rooms were full of people, many of whom one would be glad enough to see nowadays, after seventy years' vicarious acquaintance with them, through books and tradition. There is no need of naming them here, nor were their appearance and casual conversation (temporary costumes and customs aside) any more remarkable than would be the case in a similar gathering in the London of our times. Philip, indeed, was quite as well worth noticing as any other person there; and he certainly was noticed to the full extent of his deserts. There were murmurs on every side of "That's he!"—"Which?"—"There—tall, short curling hair and white forehead."—"What splendid eyes!"—"Oh, did he write 'Iduna'?"—"Yes, madam: looks

like his own hero, doesn't he?"—"Is he married?"—"No."—"Yes, I assure you: two hundred thousand pounds and a beauty."—"Is she like Iduna?"—"She's sixty and a fright!"—"Have you read the poem?"—"Yes—very pretty: vastly entertaining, indeed."—"Here he comes!"—"Oh, pray introduce me!" Amidst such comments and exclamations the poet of the hour found himself adrift, with a tolerably calm and impassive exterior, and within, a voice, half sad, half comical, repeating "This is fame!"

Meanwhile, Marion had been deployed in another direction, her heart and thoughts remaining with Philip; and in this condition she was able to pay but imperfect attention to the curly-haired bright-eyed little gentleman who had just been presented to her, and whose name she had not caught. He spoke with a slight Irish brogue, and there was a kind of vivacious sentimentality in the tone of his remarks, which had a tendency, moreover, to become inconveniently high-flown and figurative. At length, to be rid of him, she got him to conduct her to a chair, and then sent him off to fetch her a glass of water. "Who's that girl Tom was talking to just now?" said one man to another, as she sat alone. "Don't know: nice fresh young creature; oh, let Tom alone for being

first in the field with whatever's going: and in a week he'll have put her in the Irish melodies, and then the next man may take what is left!" This dialogue was so little to Marion's taste that she rose from her seat and established herself under the wing of an elderly dowager with whom she happened to have some acquaintance; and there, putting her hand in her pocket to find her smelling-salts, she felt the letter that she had forgotten: whereupon she drew it forth and opened it, and was actually absorbed in its contents at the very moment when the author of "Lalla Rookh" was searching for her everywhere with a glass of water in his hand.

The letter was not long, but Marion found it unexpectedly interesting, insomuch that she read it over three or four times, with a constantly expanding sense of its importance. It was not the answer to her own letter, nor had it any reference to that; it was addressed to Philip throughout, and treated of business which was as new as it was surprising. After having considered the written words from every point of view, Marion sat with the letter in her lap and her eyes gazing at nothing, in a state of mingled bewilderment and distress. She had contended against destiny, and had seemed at first to win; but now her flank was turned, and the day was against her.

Through the midst of her perplexity she presently became aware of a dapper little figure standing before her with a glass of water in its hand: she gazed at him uncomprehendingly. Just then, however, another face, which she immediately recognised, appeared amidst the crowd, and not only restored her self-possession, but set all her faculties on edge. She rose quickly, and eluding the astonished water-carrier, she reached Fillmore's side and touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Fillmore, will you please give me your arm? I have read your letter. I wish to talk to you. Take me somewhere where we can be uninterrupted for a few minutes." Fillmore complied without asking any questions, and without showing any particular symptoms of surprise.

Philip, the lion of the evening, was in the meantime getting on very agreeably. After running the gauntlet of numerous promiscuous admirers, who besought him to tell them whether Iduna was drowned, whether the sea-god were real or only a fancy of hers, whether she married her mortal lover, and whether the latter managed to get safe off on the wreck of the castle, and much more to the same effect—after he had been parrying such inquiries as these with what ingenuity and good

humour he might for some time, he happened to raise his eyes, and saw the eyes of Perdita directed upon him from a little distance, with a beckoning expression. In a few minutes he succeeded in placing himself, with a feeling of genuine relief, by her side. And, indeed, he had no reason to be dissatisfied with his position. If there were, in that assembly, any woman more classically handsome than Perdita, there was certainly no one who could compare with her in brilliance and subtle attractiveness; nor any who knew so well how to say what a man would like to hear; nor any who, in the present instance, was better disposed to say it. She touched his shoulder lightly with her hand as he sat down, with an air and smile as if she were conferring upon him a well-earned knight-hood.

"This is the hardest part, you know," she said. "Men who do great things are always beset by little people, with their discordant little adulations. It is like what you see on the stage; when Kean or Kemble has given a great passage, and your ears are ringing with it, there comes a flat racket of hand-clapping. That is the world's applause!"

"We must take the deed for the will," said Philip, laughing, "and be glad to get it."

"And so you wish me to believe," pursued

Perdita, "that love is a vision that cannot be realised in this world?"

"I don't know that I mean that," he replied; "and I don't want to undertake the responsibility of my own poetical morals. But love is like life, perhaps, never to be found by any dissection of mortal hearts or brains. It is above what can be seen or touched, though that may embody it. You see I am as great a fool as any of my readers. I don't know, any more than the young lady I was just talking with, whether Iduna was drowned or married. But neither do I care."

"There is more than one man in every real poet," remarked Perdita, looking at him intently for a moment, and then looking down; "and the one who appears in the flesh is not always, I suspect, the one best worth having. And yet he may be worth breaking one's heart for. What do you think?"

"I don't remember having made any experiments," said Philip, rather awkwardly.

"Well, it is hardly worth remembering," she rejoined, with one of her ambiguous smiles. "If we remembered everything, we should never do anything, probably; and that may be one reason why women do so little. And so you are married, Philip?"

"Yes," he said, a little reluctant to follow up this turn of the conversation.

"What a delightful thing a true marriage must be," she went on; "especially when a poet is the bridegroom. For he must know, better than any other man, what woman to choose. You have seen the world, my friend, and studied the human heart; and I congratulate you on having found the woman best suited to make you happy."

"I'm not so difficult as you seem to think," returned Philip; "but if I were ten times more so than I am, I should be more than content."

"I am sure of that," said Perdita, smiling again: "If all men were as fortunate as you, *mon ami*, the world would be the happier. Marion is a poet's wife. She comprehends you. She reverences your genius even more than you do, and she will do more than your genius to make you illustrious. She has the simplicity and the unsuspiciousness that one finds only in the highest natures; she will never harass you with foolish doubts and questions: she will never do anything whimsical or arbitrary; she will never make you appear absurd. She makes me wish that I were like her."

Perdita uttered the last sentences in a low and serious tone. She was looking her loveliest; fit

to be the consort of a king or the heroine of an epic. She was warm, exquisite, tinted like a flower, and sparkling like the gems upon her bosom; she had all the grace of a woman, and more than a woman's substance and individuality, and she was telling Philip that she wished she were like his wife! Philip, though not exactly destitute of vanity or of liability to infatuation, was not readily to be deceived. He was quite able to believe that Perdita might be making game of him. And yet, hearing the tones of her voice and looking in her face, he did not believe it. Her words, indeed, could be taken with more than one signification; but there must be genuineness in them somewhere. She wished that she were like Philip's wife. Did that mean that she really considered Marion's qualities of mind and person were more desirable than her own? Or did she mean that there was some cause, unavowed but not unimaginable, why she should desire them more? Some cause not unimaginable: what? She had just expressed her conviction, in tones unusually earnest for an assemblage like Lady Flanders's, that Marion's qualities were such as must command Philip's love. What, then, was the significance of her wishing they might be hers? It was plain enough; indeed, it was its very plainness that was the strongest obstacle in the way

of Philip's so understanding it. And yet, thorough as was his love for Marion, he recognised too clearly the wonderful charms and fascinations of Perdita to believe that she could compare herself with his wife to her own disadvantage. No: what she had said was, at least, an implicit censure of his blindness in having preferred Marion or any other woman to Perdita herself.

It is to Philip's credit that he did not allow himself to appear in the least conscious of the unavoidable inference in the matter; but only laughed, and said that he had no doubt anyone would like his wife better than his poetry, if they could be afforded the opportunity. And before anything else could be said, who should appear before them but Marion herself, leaning on Merton Fillmore's arm, looking very pale, and with a peculiar satirical touch to her expression which Philip had not seen there since the early days of his acquaintance with her, and which made him a little uneasy. As for Fillmore, his demeanour was, as usual, admirably composed; but Philip fancied that there was something in the glance he bestowed upon him that seemed to say, "Can a honeymoon be eclipsed?"

"Good evening, Madame Desmoines," said

Marion lightly ; "I hope I see you well in health ? Do you like my husband ?"

"His poetry has made me rather disappointed with himself ; but he is all the better for having such a wife," returned the Marquise, with engaging courtesy.

"I am only afraid of his being too fortunate . . . in some things !" Marion said laughingly ; "so, to make the balance even, I am going to inflict on him the misfortune of taking me home That is, if he will."

"That misfortune is the best of all his fortunes this evening," was Perdita's reply ; "and I am enough his friend to be glad of it."

While these courtesies were passing between the ladies, Philip, who perceived that something serious was the matter, had risen and placed himself by Marion's side, and they now moved away together, while Fillmore appropriated Philip's vacated chair. When the young poet and his wife went to make their adieux to Lady Flanders, her ladyship said to Marion, "I saw your husband flirting with that little Marquise. Don't you let him do it ! She's the most dangerous woman in this room, and the only one who is cleverer than I am. But I'm clever enough to see through her, and I hope you are !"

And with this benediction the young couple set out homewards.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE drive back to Hammersmith was not a particularly agreeable one. Philip began by maintaining a grave silence : he felt his dignity somewhat impaired by the almost peremptory summons to come home before the party was half over, without any reason given or time for consideration allowed ; and he suspected that it might be due to some new jealousy on Marion's part towards Perdita, which made him prefer to leave the conduct of the conversation in her hands. Lady Flanders's parting observations had been peculiarly apt from this point of view, and Philip secretly owed her a grudge for them ; the rather since, although his own conscience acquitted him well enough in the matter, there was no denying that Perdita's language had been open to the charge of ambiguity. Marion, however, could not have been aware of this, and her suspicions, if she had

any, must have been aroused by some communication from a third person. Now, it was manifestly undesirable that any third person should be permitted to come between husband and wife at all, much more that the interference should have any weight ascribed to it, except as an interference. Marion was in the wrong, therefore, to begin with, be her own grievance what it might; and Philip deemed it incumbent on his self-respect to bring forward her explanations without any motion on his side to anticipate them.

As for Marion, she was silent at first from excitement, which, from whatever cause arising, always had a perverse or contradictory effect upon her demeanour; causing her to laugh at what was serious, and to be reticent when volubility would have seemed more natural. Moreover, having so much to say, she did not know what to say first; and the matter in hand being, from her point of view, of great importance, she desired to make as few mistakes as possible, especially at the beginning. She saw, too, that Philip was not in an especially good humour, and she wished to mitigate his displeasure before unloading her heart to him. She had, up to this time, full confidence in his love for her; but she was conscious that what she had to propose would be somewhat

trying to his generosity ; and she desired to start with as prosperous a breeze as possible.

Accordingly, she pulled off her glove within her muff (which was large enough to have allowed of much more extensive evolutions) and slipped her warm hand into Philip's. He, however, had his gloves on, and was not expecting her demonstration ; and between his unreadiness and his glove it did not succeed very well. To make matters worse, he said :

"Didn't you bring your gloves with you, my dear ?—'tis a very cold night."

"Oh, yes ; but I didn't feel cold," she replied carelessly, returning her hand to her muff ; and then, feeling that this was not a hopeful opening, she added : "It was too bad to take you away so early, Philip : but I thought you wouldn't mind when you knew."

Kensington roads were not so smoothly paved then as they are now, and the wheels rattling over the cobble-stones prevented Philip from hearing what she said. He said, "What ?" and she, with a sense of being rebuffed, only felt inclined to reply, "You seemed to be enjoying yourself so much, I was sorry to take you away."

"The enjoyment was nothing, one way or the other," he returned ; "but it seemed rather

absurd to make so sudden a retreat—don't you think so?"

"You would not think it absurd if you knew my reasons: I could not help it," said Marion quickly.

"Well, I am ready to hear them," rejoined Philip, with an air of judicial impartiality.

Marion had some resentful reply on the tip of her tongue, but she checked herself in time. "I think I would rather wait till we get home," she said at length. "We cannot talk comfortably in this noise."

Philip signified his assent to this arrangement by folding his arms and leaning back in his corner of the carriage; and very few words more were exchanged between the husband and wife during the rest of the drive: so that by the time they arrived at the house, both felt as if they had in some intangible way been injured. But Marion had the more elastic temper of the two, and she reminded herself that Philip had, after all, some reason to be out of sorts; and when she turned to him at last, in the solitude of their room, it was with a face smiling, though pale.

"Now, my Philip, you are going to be astonished!" she said. "In the first place, I have been reading a letter written to you."

Philip looked a little blank, running through in his mind all the imaginable persons who might have written him letters which he would not have wished Marion to read; but he almost immediately replied, "Why didn't you speak of it before we left home?"

"I put it in my pocket, and didn't read it till after we arrived: it was from Mr. Fillmore, Philip" (Philip's brow relaxed), "and the reason I opened it was that I was expecting one from him and thought this was it. But it was not. It was about something . . . I should never have expected. I hope you will think about it as I do. Oh, how happy I should be then!"

"Sit down, my dear," said Philip. "What is the matter?"

"It is about that miserable legacy. It seems to haunt us like an evil spirit. What do you think, love—there was a codicil in the will, as I said, and the money is left in such a way that if I refuse it, it might come to you, unless you refuse it too. And I hope——"

"Come to me!" echoed Philip in amazement. "How is that?"

"It is the wording of the codicil that makes it so," said Marion. "It says: 'To my nearest

acknowledged relative,' or something of that sort; and that might be you."

"It might be I, if it were not the Marquise Desmoines," returned Philip, with a short laugh. "You forget her."

"No, I didn't forget her; but Mr. Fillmore says that she will not acknowledge that she is his daughter at all. And you are the next nearest to her."

"I never in my life heard of twenty thousand pounds going begging in this fashion," said Philip, bringing his hands down on the arms of the chair. "Anybody would think it was poisoned. So she maintains she is not his daughter?"

"It is very strange of her: there must be some reason besides what she says," remarked Marion. "I remember when she stood by the bed where he was lying, poor dear, she called him 'father'; and though he could not hear her, I could."

"Well, that is not legal proof, after all."

"But the letters in the packet she gave me to keep—those would be legal."

"They might or they might not. There's no telling."

"I will send them to her, so that it may be known."

"No. She gave them to you to keep for her. You cannot return them with courtesy until she asks for them. And 'tis easy to understand why she should wish them to remain unread. If Mr. Grantley was really her father——"

"Philip, do you doubt it?"

"My belief is that he was everything that is honourable; but what I believe or not is nothing to the purpose. Of course, if he was her father, and an honest man, it follows that something must be very wrong with Sir Francis Bendibow——"

"I am sure of that!"

"Well, I know nothing about it; but what everybody does know is that Perdita is Bendibow's adopted daughter, and is under a certain obligation——"

"He did not treat her well: she says so herself."

"In society, Marion, there is a convention to take certain things for granted. The conventional supposition in this case is that she is under obligations to Bendibow. Why should she create a scandal about a matter that was settled, for good or evil, a score of years since? Who would gain by Bendibow's being shamed? Those letters either contain the evidence of his shame, or they

do not; and, in either case, it is reasonable enough that she should wish to let them alone."

"I do not believe that that is her reason for refusing this legacy."

"What in heaven's name can it be, then?"

"I think she . . . But that is not what I want to say. Philip, do you mean to take this money?"

"If no one contests my right to it, I certainly shall," said Philip, with his chin in his hand.

Marion's heart beat hard. She had anticipated reluctance on her husband's part, but not opposition so determined as this. She hesitated what to do next. That Perdita did not really doubt Grantley to have been her father, Marion was of course convinced. The recollection of what had passed on that tragic morning when the Marquise had called her in to witness Bendibow's exposure, and Marion herself had interposed, and with difficulty saved him, was only too distinct in her memory. Perdita had believed then, and there was no reason why she should doubt now. But on the other hand, Marion herself was responsible for Perdita's present attitude. Marion had asked her not to open the packet, and Perdita—certainly from a generous motive—had complied. In the exultation

of that moment, the two women had kissed each other. Which had maintained the more consistent course since then—Perdita or Marion? Logically, Perdita. She had agreed, for Bendibow's sake, and at Marion's request, outwardly to ignore the fact that she was Grantley's daughter: and how, on that understanding, could she act otherwise than she had done? There was no logical answer to this question; on the contrary, it was Marion who had receded from her position. And yet Marion could not admit herself unjust. Though Perdita had not altered her course, Marion was persuaded that she had changed her motives in pursuing it. It was no longer compassion for Sir Francis that swayed her, but designs upon Philip. It would be impossible to describe, or even to know, by precisely what means Marion had arrived at this conclusion. It is instinct, not reason, that warns a woman when to be jealous of another; and it seems as if she could perceive the purpose in the other's heart, even before it has declared itself in any overt act. In such circumstances, however, the injured woman can do nothing but affirm her conviction; by the magnetism whereof, and by no other means, can she hope to influence the man. But he can always out-argue her, if he chooses.

Though she felt the premonition of defeat, therefore, Marion resolved not to give up the contest: the spirit of her father was aroused in her, and she was strengthened by the thought that she was fighting not only for herself, but in behalf of Philip's higher self likewise.

"Don't you think there is something more than legal rights to be considered?" she said at last. "Would you condescend to accept favours from a woman like Madame Desmoines?"

"I know nothing of Madame Desmoines that puts her below the level of other people: but there is no favour in the matter. She is doing what pleases her best, without any reference to me: and I simply accept things as they are."

"She means to put you under an obligation to her, and to use the power that will give her. You say you can read the human heart: Philip, can't you read so easy a thing as that? That was the reason I would not take the money; and if I would not, much less should you."

"Was that your reason? It was not the one you gave, if I remember right."

"I believed, then, that you were generous enough to spare me the affront of such an explanation," said Marion haughtily. "But after all, it is more for your sake than mine . . . it would

look better for me to be obliged to her, than for you. And for you to accept what I refused is as much as to say that you disapproved what I did."

"Well, perhaps I did. It doesn't follow, because I let you have your way, that I thought you were acting sensibly. And 'tis certainly no reason why you should force me to make another such sacrifice on my own account. There's a limit to everything!"

"It is the same now as it was then, you agreed from love of me then, you must love me less now, since you refuse."

"This is too absurd, Marion. For some cause or other, or for no cause at all rather, you are jealous of Madame Desmoines. If I were to yield to you in this, it would be as much as to say that your jealousy had some foundation. It has none, and I won't do it. You have no right to say that I don't love you, If you were generous, you would not say it."

"I don't say that you care more for Madame Desmoines than you do for me, Philip; if I thought that, I would never trouble you again, in any way. But I know that she cares for you, and you might know it, too, if you would. I saw her face while she was talking with you at the party to-night. I could tell what was in in her mind. Men never

seem to see those things: though they get the benefit of them!"

"'Tis no use talking with you till you get your senses back, Marion: and this is not what we set out to discuss, either."

Marion had something more to say about Madame Desmoines, but she managed to keep it back. She knew that if her temper got the mastery of her, there would be an end, not only of this discussion, but of many other things also; of her love, and, practically, of her life. She feared lest she might hate her husband; and she feared still more lest she might despise him. She resumed in a voice low and shaken by the struggle of emotions in her heart:

"Let all the rest go; and why should you take this money, Philip? Do we need it more than we did yesterday? But for this strange chance, you would never have thought of it again. We have more than enough already for two years to come, if we live with any sort of economy. Thousands of people marry every day on less money than you have at this moment, and without your means of making more, and they succeed and are happy. There is nothing that makes a husband and wife love each other more than to fight their way through the world together—triumphing toge-

ther, and suffering together, if need be; but to feel that we are in the least dependent will drive us more and more apart. Oh! I am sure this money will only be a misfortune and a misery to us! Good cannot come of it. And what if we are poor? I have been poor all my life, and yet you married me!"

Philip listened to all this with a secret feeling of relief. Marion had now taken the ground where he was strong and she was weak. In depth of passion and fire of temper, he was less than her equal; and had she carried on her attack with those weapons, she might have come out victorious; for he was not prepared to go such lengths as she would have gone, had she given herself rein. But women like Marion are seldom aware of their own most formidable powers, and hence are so often worsted by those who are really less strong, but more ingenious and adaptable than they.

Moreover, there was on Philip's side both human nature (as moral frailty is called in such connection) and a good deal of reason. In allowing Marion her will on the previous occasion, he had stretched abnegation to pretty nearly its limit in his case; and had so much the less at his disposal for the present emergency. If he had permitted himself to grumble his fill in the first instance, he

would not have had so much stored discontent on hand for the second; and when he found Marion in the position of standing upon what she had gained and demanding as much again, he defined his objections as follows:

"There ought to be no question about our love for each other, Marion; we settled that once for all, before we were married. And your pride and prejudices are not involved, since it is to me and not to you that the legacy is now offered. I gave you leave to manage your own affairs as you judged best, and 'tis only fair you should give the same liberty to me. Now, it is quite plain that Grantley meant one or other of us to have this money; and if the wording of the codicil was made to apply also to Perdita, it was only lest the money, in the last resort, might not have to be thrown into the gutter. If I were to take the stand you wish me to, I should only be putting both you and myself in a childish and sentimental light. Everybody would laugh at us. Besides, there is the practical point of view. What right have we, in face of all the accidents and vicissitudes of life, to reject such a windfall? I might fall ill to-morrow, or my next poem might be a failure: we shall probably have children, and they must be provided for as well as ourselves.

And 'tis a great thing, Marion, for a man who aspires to be a poet, to be put a little above the necessity of working for daily bread, and living from hand to mouth. Then again, 'tis my right as well as to my advantage to take a position in society suitable to the name I bear. A fortune, my dear, is something real and enduring; but sentimental scruples and prejudices pass away."

Philip's mind, during this harangue, was less comfortable than his language. Whatever reason might say, he felt that he was taking a lower level than Marion. He was too much of a poet not to be conscious of the unloveliness of the cause he was called on to defend. And now, at this last moment, there was the germ of a wish in his heart that Marion might somehow have her desire, and this load of pelf tumble away from both of them, and be forgotten.

But Marion, who had been sitting with her face averted and her cheek leaning on her hand, now turned towards him with a look in which pain mingled with a curious smile.

"Don't say any more, Philip," she said, with a sort of dreary lightness. "I would rather do all you wish than hear any more reasons. Everything shall be as you please: I am your wife, and since you won't be what I want, I will be what

you want, and there's an end of it! It will be easier for me, now the pinch is over, and I hope 'twill be pleasanter for you. It's better, I suppose, that we should understand each other now than later. Heigho! Well, I'm sleepy. To-morrow we'll begin to be rich; and let us see who does it best!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE Marquise Desmoines had, at the end of the summer, relinquished her abode in Red Lion Square and gone to live in more luxurious quarters farther west. Apparently, her experiment of life in London had pleased her, and she meant to have some more of it. She had remained in town during the greater part of the dead season, giving the house-furnishers and decorators the benefit of her personal supervision and suggestions. The lady had a genius for rendering her surroundings both comfortable and beautiful: even more, perhaps, than for enjoying the beauty and comfort when they were at her disposal. She appreciated the

ease and ornament of life with one side of her nature; but another and dominant side of it was always craving action, employment, and excitement, and, as a means to these ends, the companionship and collisions of human beings. Her imagination was fond of giving it rein, though she seldom lost control of it; but it led her to form schemes and picture forth situations, in mere wantonness of spirits, which, sometimes, her sense of humour or love of adventure prompted her to realise. At the same time, she was very quick to comprehend the logic of facts, and to discriminate between what could and what could not be altered. But it was her belief that one of the most stubborn and operative of facts is the human will, especially the will of a woman like herself; and upon this persuasion much of her career was conditioned.

After her house was finished, and she established in it, and before the return from their wedding-trip of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lancaster, Perdita spent most of her time in retirement and great apparent serenity. She rode on horseback a great deal, and saw very little company. Indoors, she occupied herself ostensibly in arranging flowers and in music. Old Madame Cabot, her respectable and dreary female companion, had seldom known

her mistress to be so composed and unenterprising. All the Marquise seemed to want was to be let alone: she had developed a novel passion for meditation. What did she meditate about? To judge by her countenance, about nothing very melancholy. To be sure, although no one could express more by her countenance than the Marquise Desmoines, it was rash to make inferences from it to her mind. I might well be that, had she wished to indulge in lugubrious thoughts, she was not without means of doing so. She had been in contact with some tragic experiences of late: and her entrance upon the estate of widowhood had placed her at a turning-point in the path of existence; a place where one must needs pause, to review what is past and to conjecture or to plan what may be to come. Such periods are seldom altogether cheerful to those who have passed the flush of their youth. It cannot be denied, moreover, that Perdita had undergone an unusual moral stimulus at the time when she and Marion met over the murdered body of Charles Grantley; and that stimulus had been followed by consequences. But did it mark a permanent new departure? For a character like Perdita's, was anything permanent except the conflicting and powerful elements whereof the character itself was composed? Were

evil and good anything more to her than different ways of keeping alive the interest of life? Whoever is wicked in this world, still the balance of wickedness and virtue will remain broadly the same. The individual varies; the human race continues unaltered. We grow and act as nature and circumstances, determine; and sometimes circumstances are the stronger, sometimes nature.

There were phases of Perdita's inward existence with which Madame Cabot was probably unacquainted. The Marquise wanted several things, and would not be at rest until she got them; and, by that time, new objects of desire would arise. It may be that she had not defined to herself exactly what she wanted, or that she merely wanted to achieve a certain mental or moral situation, and was indifferent by what methods she achieved it. The truth is, a woman like Perdita is as dangerous as fire—resembles fire in her capacities both for benefit and mischief. And if Madame Cabot could have beheld her at certain times, in the solitude of her room, pacing up and down the floor with her hands behind her back; or cutting a sheet of paper into shreds with a sharp pair of scissors; or lying at full length upon the cushions of a lounge, with her hands clasped behind her head, her white throat exposed,

and her dark eyes roving restlessly hither and thither; or springing up to examine herself in a low rapid tone, with interspersed smiles and frowns; — if Madame Cabot could have seen all this, she might have doubted whether, after all, the Marquise was going to settle down into an uneventful, humdrum existence.

The party at Lady Flanders's was Perdita's first prominent appearance in London society, and it seemed also to introduce a change in her mood. She was now less inclined to shut herself up alone, more talkative and vivacious than she had latterly been. She kept Madame Cabot in constant employment, though about nothing in particular, and addressed to her all manner of remarks and inquiries, of many of which the dreary old lady could not divine the drift, and almost fancied, at times, that the Marquise must imagine her to be some one else; especially as Perdita had more than once exclaimed, "But after all you are not a man!" One afternoon, when Perdita had been in exceptionally good spirits, the servant announced Mr. Merton Fillmore.

"Mr. Fillmore?" she repeated. "Well let him be admitted."

He had already called upon her several times, always with more or less reference to

business matters, and there was a fair degree of familiarity between them. Perdita had not been insensible to the keenness and virility of his mind and the cultivation of his taste; and for this and other reasons she was disposed to have a liking for him. As he entered the room she rose to receive him, with a smile that might have conferred distinction on a night-watchman. Fillmore, on his part, seemed also in a very genial frame of mind, and they began to chat together most pleasantly.

"Now, I hope you have not come about any business," said the Marquise, after they had touched upon Lady Flanders and kindred topics.

"You are not in a business humour?"

"I don't like business to be my rival."

"Do you regard as a rival the key that opens the door to you?"

"Sir, I disapprove of keys altogether. If my door is closed, no key can open it; and if it is open" She made a gesture with her hand.

"I shall take you at your word," said Fillmore quietly, after he had looked at her for a moment. There was something in his tone that conveyed more than any amount of conventional thanks and compliments. "As for business," he

continued, "you have already put that away from you by force and violence."

Perdita laughed. "I have behaved like a fool, haven't I?"

"That is what people would say."

"What do you say?"

"I think you were wise."

"Not even generous?"

"To be generous, one must sacrifice something."

"Well?"

"It is true you have sacrificed your curiosity."

Perdita laughed again. "And that is wise rather than generous, you think? But my curiosity might come to life again some day. By the way, have you any news of Sir Francis?"

"People say of him that 'he will never be himself.' Perhaps that would not be a very hard saying for the best of us. But Bendibow is certainly suffering. He looks old and haggard, and his mind seems out of poise. He is living at his Twickenham place: I have seen him only twice. 'Tis impossible to lift him out of his mood: you cannot fix his attention. I wished to make him agree to the appointment of some capable man to take charge of the Bank, but he would listen to nothing. The servants say he is constantly

muttering to himself, when he fancies he is alone."

"Can Sir Francis Bendibow go mad because his son is dead?" interrupted Perdita, leaning back on the sofa and looking at Fillmore with eyes half closed.

"He was very fond of the boy," replied Fillmore, after a pause: "and possibly the circumstances may have been more disturbing than is generally supposed. 'Tis said that he manifests some peculiarities—" he checked himself.

"Go on!" said Perdita. "My imagination is worse than my curiosity."

"He disappears for several hours at a time, generally after dark, without mentioning where he is going."

"So you consider me wise in not sending for the packet and opening it?"

"Why should you?"

"If I should, some time, would you advise me?"

"I would rather not."

"By the way, talking of the packet, how are our friends the Lancasters getting on?"

"Rather brilliantly, I should judge. Mrs. Lancaster, especially, seems to accept her changed circumstances very cordially."

"I am glad to hear it," said Perdita, mani.

festing interest. "She was reluctant enough at first."

"She has a singular character; not easy to fathom. Mr. Grantley probably understood her better than most people. She may have been unwilling that her husband should appear to be dependent on her. At all events they are making preparations for a fashionable appearance in society: Lancaster's success is assured already; and for aught I know, his wife may have it in her to make an even greater success than he."

"What are they doing?"

"I understand they have rented a house in a desirable quarter; some additions are to be built to it, and alterations made; and then it will be furnished as taste and Providence may permit. Meanwhile, as of course you are aware, 'Iduna' continues to sell new editions, and all the omens are propitious."

"What do you think of 'Iduna'?" asked Perdita carelessly.

"It is strong—too strong, I should fancy, for a bridegroom."

"More knowledge of love than a bachelor had a right to have—is that what you mean?" inquired Perdita, arching her brows.

"There is such a thing as understanding a

passion too clearly to feel it," Fillmore answered. "You may take up a matter either intellectually or emotionally, but you will seldom be equally strong in both directions."

"But the pleasure of emotion is only in feeling. It is blind. Intellect is sight. Sight often makes sensation more pleasurable."

"A man who is in love, madame, wishes to do something more than to enjoy his own sensations; he wishes to have them shared by the lady of his choice. To insure that he must, at least, love with all his strength. And, as a matter of experience, there is little evidence to show that the best poets of love have also been the best lovers. They filter their hearts through their heads, so to speak they imagine more than they can personally realise. There is Byron, for instance——"

"Yes: I saw him in Italy: he is an actor, who always plays one *rôle*—Byron! But he is not like others. A poet of love . . . if he is not a good lover, it may be because he never happens to meet a woman lovable enough. But when he does meet her . . . it would be heaven for them both!" The Marquise seldom spoke with so much fervour and earnestness.

Fillmore looked at her intently, and his

ordinarily unimpassioned face slowly reddened. He pressed one clenched hand strongly into the palm of the other.

"I have one argument," he said, "to prove that poets are not the best lovers."

"Arguments don't always convince me. What is it?"

"I am no poet myself."

"Is that your argument?" demanded Perdita, after a moment.

"Yes."

"How would you apply it?"

Fillmore, for once, hesitated. A great deal depended, for him, on what he might say next. Perdita was looking extremely lovely, yet she had not precisely the kind of expression that he would have wished her to have at this moment. But the man had made up his mind, long ago, as to what he intended to do, and he reflected that the mood of the moment would not make much difference in the long run. Success in his project was either possible, or it was not: but, at all events, a temporary rebuff, should that happen, was not going to discourage him. So he manned himself, and said, quietly and firmly:

"Though I am no poet, no poet could love you more than I do."

Perdita was perfectly still for a moment; not a nerve vibrated. She was instantly aware that she would on no account accept Fillmore's offer; but it had been entirely unexpected, and she wished to give the surprise an opportunity to define its quality. It seemed to her not altogether disagreeable, simply as a betrayal of Fillmore's state of mind towards her. She was pleased to have won the love of a man of his calibre; and she had the good sense, or discernment, to perceive that he loved her for herself, and not for any intrinsic advantage that the possession of her might afford him. She also saw that he was intensely in earnest. A less self-confident and victorious woman might have felt some consternation at the prospect of conflict which the situation contained: but Perdita, on the contrary, felt only exhilaration.

"When we first met," she said at length, "you remarked that I would make a good lawyer. You understood me better then than you seem to do now."

Fillmore shook his head.

"I might make a good lawyer," Perdita continued, "but I should make a very bad lawyer's wife."

"I am a man as well as a lawyer," said Fillmore, bending a strong look upon her.

"And a gentleman as well as a man," she added, with a gracious smile, "In fact, sir, if you were less agreeable, I might love you; but as it is, I like you and enjoy your society much too well for that. I would rather hate you than love you: and as for marrying you—pardon me for being the first to speak the word, but widows have privileges—I would rather love you and have you jilt me!"

There was a certain delicate comicality in Perdita's way of saying this, which, though it implied no slight to Fillmore, was more disheartening than the most emphatic and serious "No" would have been.

"I had been flattering myself with the idea that you looked upon me more as if I were a man than a woman," she continued. "Anyone can fall in love with a pretty woman; and there is less distinction in being loved by a man like you, than in having you treat me as a friend and an equal—if you would do that!"

"You are the only woman who has ever been a woman for me," replied Fillmore, with passion. "The love both of my youth and of my manhood is yours. I will do anything to win you. I will never give you up."

"Oh, I can easily make you give me up," said Perdita with a sigh.

"How?"

"By letting you know me better."

"You do not know me!" he exclaimed.

"I shall always love some one else better than you."

"Who?" demanded he, turning pale.

"Myself!" said Perdita, with a laugh.

"You can be my wife, nevertheless."

"That I never will," she said, looking him in the face.

He rose from his chair. "I will never give you up," he repeated. "I will go now. You will let me come again?"

"As often as you like: I am not afraid of you," was her answer. Fillmore bowed and turned away. She had had the advantage so far. But he loved her thrice as much as he had done before, and he had never suffered defeat in anything he had undertaken. She neither loved him nor feared him?—But she could be his wife, nevertheless; and he would do anything to win her.

CHAPTER X.

A CERTAIN change was no doubt observable in Marion. It might have been supposed that a life so secluded and reserved as hers had been thus far, would not have encountered the novel conditions of wealth and fashion without some awkwardness and bewilderment. But it was not so. She met the Goddess of Fortune half-way, and seemed in no respect at a loss how to greet her. In fact, the only sign she betrayed of being unaccustomed to abundant worldly resources was the activity and despatch she showed in taking advantage of them; as if life offered nothing but a variety of diversions, and it was incumbent upon one who appreciated life at its true value to canvass that variety in the shortest space possible. Whether she held, further, that the variety was to be inexhaustible, or the life short, did not appear. Philip was at first pleased with her alacrity; afterwards his pleasure was less, and his surprise greater. He had promised himself some gratification in intro-

ducing his wife to the greater society, and initiating her into its splendours and amusements: but he found, not only that his leadership was unnecessary, but that he would have to exert himself to be the leader at all. Marion was fully equal to her position and opportunities. She faced the sun unshrinkingly, and, indeed, with a smile almost as of half-contemptuous familiarity. When she referred to the simplicity and difficulty of her previous experience, it was generally to expose the humorous aspect of the contrast with the present.

"What a beautiful thing wealth is!" she exclaimed one day to her husband.

"Glad you think so," the latter replied, cautiously: for he seldom could be sure, nowadays, whether Marion's observations would turn out serious or cynical.

"'Tis the best missionary in the world," she continued; "it Christianizes even tradesmen, and makes them self-sacrificing. And the curious part is, that 'tis not their being wealthy themselves, but their knowing us to be, that makes them so magnanimous. When mother and I were poor—pardon my mentioning such a thing, but 'tis only between ourselves—our tradesmen not only permitted us to pay our bills, but insisted on our

doing so promptly; and if we got behindhand, they growled about bailiffs. But now—la! bless you, the mention of a bill hurts their feelings, and to pay one would break their hearts. It's a blessed change of heart in them; and would have been more blessed still if it had only happened to come before our change of pocket, instead of after."

"If we go on at our present rate, both they and we may relapse," said Philip, laughing. "Twenty thousand pounds capital is not twenty thousand a year."

"It is, for one year; and who knows what may happen after that? We might count on two years, even: the faith of the tradesmen would hold out so long at least."

"They don't ask us to pay now only because they know their money is safe," said Mrs. Lockhart, with her pathetic literalness. "And they don't lose anything, because our orders are larger, and their prices are higher. And you should be just as careful not to run in debt, my dear, when you are rich as when you are poor."

Marion looked at her mother with an odd smile. "I wish you'd let me forget you," she said, at length. "You've been encouraging me all

my life to be a woman of fashion, and now you turn against me. But I'm determined not to be baulked!"

And, in truth, Marion had made a good beginning. The old house in Hammersmith had been shut up (it was her desire that it should be neither let nor sold), and they had gone into the new and improved mansion whereof Fillmore had spoken to Perdita. They kept a carriage and horses, half a dozen servants, and an excellent table; gave parties and routs to their fashionable acquaintance, and accepted the like civilities from them. It was the thing in society at that moment to go to the Lancasters; Philip was a genius, besides being nearly related to Lord Seabridge; Marion was charming, witty, and fully up to her position; her father, it was understood, had been a distinguished officer and a personal friend of the Iron Duke. Among the most notable of their new friends was old Lady Flanders, who not only honoured their drawing-room with her presence when the rest of the world was there, but quite often took the trouble to drop in on them informally. She had once or twice met Mrs. Lockhart in London and at the Baths, when the latter was lovely Fanny Pell, forty years or so ago; and she now came ostensibly to renew her acquaintance with that

lady, and to talk over the old times. But in the midst of these amiable reminiscences, it was observable that she gave a good deal of attention to young Mrs. Lancaster, who seemed to have a peculiar interest for her.

"You like having money, Mrs. Lancaster," her ladyship remarked one day, after examining critically a new dress which Marion had on.

"I cannot deny it, Lady Flanders."

"Nonsense! A woman like you can deny anything. But you're quite in the right not to deny it. We hear a great deal from silly people about the dignity of poverty. That is just what poverty is not: poverty is not dignified! 'Tis hard enough to hold up one's head at the best of times—such arrant knaves and humbugs as we all are, and all of us except the fools know it; but on an empty pocket 'tis impossible! I recollect when I was in Egypt, about thirty years ago, meeting a Bedouin Arab who, I thought for a while, was an exception to the rule. He hadn't a rag on him, except a greasy turban and a yard of ragged cloak dangling down his back; he was as dirty as a stable floor; but he had the bearing of a prince—though not of a good many princes I could name, neither. That man (said I) is an incarnation of dignity and a type of poverty, both in one; and if he'd have

me, I'd marry him to-night! What were we talking about?"

"That poverty could not be dignified."

"Ay: very true. So, just to prove my rule by this exception, said I, 'My friend, I'll give you fourpence to go up to the top of that pyramid and be back here again in five minutes.' He dropped his dignity—it was about all he had to drop, as I told you—and scuttled up that pyramid like a squirrel. He earned his fourpence, and I married his lordship." Here Lady Flanders took snuff, and added, "You may live to find out, Mr. Lancaster, that you have been too avaricious. You weren't satisfied with a wife; you must have a fortune into the bargain. Look out you don't find yourself without both some fine morning."

"Your ladyship is kind to forewarn me," said Philip, who was always rubbed the wrong way by Lady Flanders.

"You don't believe me; but you are a poet and a philosopher, and you comprehend the structure of the universe too clearly to see into your own domestic business. You don't know, at this moment, what to make of your wife's extravagance and ambition. She used to be quite different, didn't she? And you understood her character so well, you were sure prosperity couldn't

spoil her.—They are all like that, my dear," she continued, turned to Marion; "they load us down to the water's edge, or below it, and expect us to dance about and mind the helm just as prettily as when we were unburdened. They don't know our weapons; they can feel them in their hearts, or in their purses, or in what they call their honour; but they can never see what strikes them, or how they are struck. I don't blame you, my dear: give him all he deserves: but I have a regard for you, and shouldn't like to see you crippling yourself in the process. But you have a head to see your way, as well as a heart to feel his impositions. I shall look for you to give a good account of him a year hence. 'Tis a pity he hasn't a title. But we may be able to get him one: I'll see about it. I have found such things very useful."

It was difficult to say what Lady Flanders meant by this kind of diatribes, which, indeed, were never more embarrassing than when she took it for granted that her interlocutor was sagacious enough to understand her. It was plain, nevertheless, that this awful old aristocrat possessed an uncomfortable keenness of insight; and that she generally put the worst construction on whatever she saw. Philip perceived that she en-

joyed opposition, as giving her an opportunity for repartee, in which she was fatally proficient; and therefore seldom entered into a discussion with her. But what she said about Marion, and her general tone regarding her, appealed to a certain obscure misgiving in Philip's own mind, and made him feel more ill at ease than he would have liked to confess. He smiled as complacently as he could; but the smile was painfully superficial.

From Marion herself, meanwhile, he could obtain little or no satisfaction. He did not speak to her "seriously" on the subject, partly because he could not exactly define to himself what the subject was, and partly, perhaps, because he feared to discover that the subject, be it what it might, would turn out more serious than might be agreeable.

"You deserve credit for being so civil to that hideous old woman," he would sometimes say.

"Not at all!" Marion would reply laughingly. "Lady Flanders represents the world. I am going to be a woman of the world, and so I pay court to her. She tells me a great many things 'tis necessary I should know. The obligation is on my side."

"You are going to be a woman of the world, are you?"

"La! of course. What would you have me do? I used to be very busy washing clothes and getting the dinner, in the old times; but now I have a laundress and a cook and a housekeeper, and nothing to attend to except inviting our guests and making myself agreeable to them. When we were in Hammersmith I was what I had to be; now I can be what I please; and it pleases me to be like . . . other fine ladies."

"Could you not make yourself agreeable to your guests and to me at the same time?"

"To you? Why, you are my husband!"

"Very true, Mrs. Lancaster."

"What can be more agreeable to you than to see your wife popular in Society?"

"We thought of something better than that when . . . we first fell in love with each other," said Philip, fixing his eyes upon her.

"Something different: but was it better? or so wise? Are not a hundred people more amusing than one? At all events, we must take the evil with the good of our position. Love in a cottage is one thing, you know, and love in a palace another."

"No love at all, perhaps you mean?"

"No such love, that's all."

"Well, if you're content, I've no more to say."

"Content! How should I not be? My ambition isn't satisfied, though. I mean to be spoken of as 'the beautiful Mrs. Lancaster' one of these days. Oh, it will come to pass, I assure you! The first thing one generally says, when one is shown a fashionable beauty, is, 'What! that homely creature!'—'tis all a matter of dress and effrontery. I shall do very well. What do you think of my gown?"

"Very fine. But what about the effrontery?"

"At all events, that costs no money," said Marion with a laugh.

Marion's social success was undeniably great. She possessed both tact and courage—two qualities not always found in company; and she had more intelligence than most of the women she came in contact with. Her figure and movement were fine, her dress was always in good taste; her voice agreeable; her face had a poignancy and variety of expression that produced the effect of beauty without being beautiful. At her presentation at Court, the Prince of Wales, who had complimented her mother more than a generation before, informed Marion that she made him wish he was young again, begad! She speedily found herself surrounded

by a circle of gentlemen who were only too ready to express their admiration for her; prominent among whom was the little Irish poet, Thomas Moore, who was not disheartened by the unceremonious treatment she had given him at their first interview: and she completed her conquest of him by singing a song which he vowed he had composed in her praise. Young Mrs. Lancaster was in demand everywhere: her box at the theatre and the opera was always crowded; when she rode or drove in the Row, she was attended by a retinue of cavaliers; she played cards, danced, talked politics, and, in short, ignored the inside and celebrated the outside of life. Lady Flanders looked on at it all, grinned horribly beneath her shaggy eyebrows, and neglected no opportunity of congratulating Philip on being the husband of so brilliant a woman. "You must look out for your laurels, Mr. Lancaster," she would add: "'Iduna' was well enough for the idyllic period, but you must give us something better now; make the lady elope with the Lord Chamberlain, and leave the Sea-God in the lurch." Mrs. Lockhart, on the other hand, whose nature it was always to enjoy what was good in the world, and not to see or believe in the bad, was placidly in the conviction that her daughter was as prosperous as she

deserved to be, and as merry as she seemed. Marion was uniformly careful not to disturb the maternal serenity, though once she startled the poor lady by exclaiming, "Oh, I wish Mr. Grant were alive!" with a passionate moan in her voice like the outcry of a soul in despair.

Was anything the matter, then? Marion had no confidants, except solitude, which tells no tales. But it may be conjectured that, when she yielded to her husband on the question of the legacy, she gave up, once for all, her view of right, and set herself to adopt his own. "If Philip wants wealth," she might have said to herself, "it must be to reap the worldly advantages of it. These are necessary to his happiness; and 'tis my duty, therefore, to help him; I will have no half-measures: and he shall have just the fashionable, dashing, rattling wife that he wants."

Having laid down this general principle, it would be characteristic of Marion to act upon it fervently. No doubt she was far from being incapable of appreciating the charm that lies in social dissipation; but she would perhaps have thrown herself into it with less of recklessness and *abandon*, had she gained access to it by some less humiliating path. There was a pride and nobility in her that had the effect of making her give more

energy and prominence to conduct which opposed her conscience than to that which was approved by it. She startled and perplexed Philip, and fascinated him also; he found in her a vigour and activity superior to his own. She out-Heroded Herod; he had not suspected all this latent power; and yet he felt that something tender and sweet and infinitely valuable was missing. There were between them no more silent sympathies and intuitive agreements. What was to be done and said, not thought and felt, was now the subject of their intercourse. Their communication was more lively but less satisfying than of yore.

What was Marion's idea and intention in this? Did she really believe that it was what her husband wanted? Logically, perhaps, she did so; but scarcely in her heart. Women, when they are logical generally are so in an extreme and illogical way; as if to demonstrate how contemptible logic is. More than half her vivacity may have been assumed in order to provoke Philip into finding fault with it; and yet, if he did find fault with it, she would profess herself at a loss to know what on earth would please him. If he suggested moderation, she would say, "No: I must be one thing or the other." If he replied, "Be the other, then," she would answer, "Too late,

now I have learnt how pleasant dissipation is." And if he asked her whether dissipation were the true end of marriage? she would laugh and reply that one cannot have everything in this world.

Thus, by degrees, were these two married lovers, who had begun their career under such fair auspices, drawing away from each other; what was best in each of them was starving for lack of nourishment; but Marion, at least, was proud enough to starve to death rather than confess to suffering. As a matter of course, since they could not meet in the only way worth meeting, they looked away from each other as much as possible. Philip tried to find consolation in his poetry; but the faculty of happy concentration and abstraction no longer came to him as formerly. The loving and confidential talks which he and Marion had been wont to have, about what he was writing, or purposing to write, were hardly practicable now; but, if he found the craving for intellectual sympathy too strong in him, there was always one place where he was sure to find it, and that was in the private boudoir of the Marquise Desmoines. She always welcomed him with loveliness and delightful words; she looked him in the eye and spoke to the point: he felt the immediate contact

of her mind and nature, and experienced from it a secret sense of luxury and consolation. At first, Perdita used to inquire courteously after Marion; but after a time these inquiries became rarer, and finally ceased. Nor did Philip happen to mention these visits to his wife: what would it matter to her where he went or what he found to converse about? She probably had her own interests and occupations, of which he was ignorant. She would only laugh, and say that he was fulfilling Lady Flanders's predictions.

Once in a while, in the midst of all this gaiety and resonance, Marion's laugh would suddenly end in a long, shuddering sigh, and her eyes would grow hot and dry. But she would laugh again, and utter some witty, extravagant speech, if she thought her husband was observing her. And once, at night, Philip chanced to awake, and fancied that Marion was weeping, and the bed was shaken by her smothered sobs. But, when he spoke to her, she started, and declared, after a moment, that she had been asleep and had a nightmare. "I dreamt Lady Flanders had grown young and beautiful," she said, "and wore a dress handsomer than mine: and it broke my heart!" Whereupon Philip said no more.

CHAPTER XI.

THERE was in Perdita a strong element of adventurousness and Bohemianism, which had not as yet been so fully gratified as to lose its poignancy. A longing came over her, occasionally, to behold phases of life that would not, in the ordinary course of things, come under her observation. At such times she would regret that she had not been born a gipsy—in oblivion of the fact that although, being a marquise, she might play at vagabondage, it would not be as easy for a vagabond to experience the sensations of a marquise. The latter has the best of it.

At this epoch of our history it so happened that Perdita fell a victim to one of the periodical attacks in question. She wanted to do or see something a little beyond the boundaries of conventional propriety. What should it be? She passed in mental review all the resources of the town. There was plenty of impropriety to be had for the taking—that was speedily evident; but

perhaps it was the very wealth of the opportunities that rendered the Marquise hard to suit. Her motive being curiosity, not desperation, she did not wish to involve herself in anything that would lay her open to social obloquy; she would not risk her escapade being discovered by people she knew. Furthermore, there were many aspects of the shady side of life which she had no disposition to investigate. Between these two stools the fair explorer was in some danger of coming to the ground; when, all at once, she made up her mind that her requirements would be well enough satisfied by a visit to Vauxhall.

"If enjoyment be your motto," observes Corinthian Tom to his country friend in the green coat and leather gaiters, "go to Vauxhall." The record of the many moving exploits of those three classic worthies had not as yet been compiled; but Vauxhall was in its glory, nevertheless. Nor could it properly be described as an improper place: improper people were to be found there, no doubt, doing improper things; but there are few places, good or bad, in this world, of which the same might not be said. The trail of the serpent is everywhere; but this being admitted, all that respectable persons have to do is to ignore it. At all events, numbers of the most respectable visited Vauxhall,

and were none the less respected for doing so; but in this, as in other matters, everything depended upon the way the thing was done. The Marquise Desmoines, for example, might, under suitable male escort, have spent all her evenings at Vauxhall with impunity: and that was one reason why she had never yet been there. What she could not so safely do was to go there alone; and it was no less an achievement than that, consequently, that she had in view. She would wear a veil, of course and a thick one; and she would be attended by Madame Cabot, not so much for protection as for convenience. But she would go to Vauxhall independent of the support of the sterner sex; and it was only reasonable to suppose that she would see something worth seeing before the night was out. She made her preparations accordingly, and gave no further explanation of her purpose to Madame Cabot than to tell her that she would require her company that evening. Madame Cabot was not aware that such a place as Vauxhall existed; and it was conceivable that the good lady might never realise, even after her return, how perilous an enterprise she had accomplished.

That evening was a fine one, and Perdita, having driven to a point near the entrance of the Gardens, and given orders to the coachman to

remain there until her return, entered the Grounds with Madame Cabot. The place was brilliant with innumerable lamps, and crowded with people. There was a sound of music in various directions, proceeding not from German brass bands, nor from Italian organ-grinders, but from the slim-legged fiddlers in cocket hats, who flourished their bows and wagged their heads beneath fan-shaped sounding-boards resplendent with gilding. Dancing was going on in some places, the participants being ranged in long rows facing one another, while two or more of their number manœuvred, capered, skimmed hand-in-hand down the middle, or dodged behind the lines, pursued by the rest in tumultuous procession. Elsewhere professional tumblers and gymnasts performed their feats in the centre of noisy crowds, and a meagre young lady in wrinkled tights and short gauze shirt appeared in mid-air above the heads of the spectators, pursuing her tottering way upon a rope depending between two thick posts. Another person of the same sex, in a nondescript costume, remarkable chiefly for its spangles, was causing wonder by her affectionate familiarities with a gaunt beast which seemed to have entered natural history on its sole responsibility, though it was only a black bear with its hair shaved off. For those whose ambition prompted

them to draw aside the veil of futurity, there was provided a long-bearded soothsayer in a glittering hermitage, who had spent his leisure in committing the history of coming ages to scraps of paper, which he disposed of at from a shilling to half a crown each. Around and between these various centres of interest the crowd twisted, shifted, elbowed, and threaded itself in and out, talking, shouting, whispering, laughing, and staring. Representatives of all classes were there: the country squire in green coat, white corduroys, and drab gaiters: young bloods in dark-blue coats, red-striped waistcoats, buckskins, hessians, and neckcloths: others in beruffled opera dress, with black silk tights and cocked hats: bruisers in loose brown jockeys and white-topped boots; theatrical characters, clean-shaven, with white lamb's-wool stockings and blue-and-bird's-eye kerchiefs: sharpers in rakish but threadbare attire, their legs encased in tight pantaloons tied at the ankles, thin shoes, and with rouge on their lank cheeks; women in bonnets like funnels, or huge hats and feathers, with short-waisted gowns and long gloves, stout and thin, tall and short, coquettish and timid, pretty and ugly: a mixed and parti-coloured assemblage, all come ostensibly to enjoy themselves, and few knowing whether they were doing so or not; alto-

gether a comical, melancholy, absurd, pathetic, restless, aimless, anomalous mass of human beings, illustrating the fact that between frank barbarism and civilisation out for a holiday, the difference, such as it is, is not in favour of the latter.

After wandering about the place, and meeting with a number of trifling adventures, such as receiving proffers of gallantry from fashionable gentlemen, one or two of whom she was acquainted with, little as they suspected whose dark eyes were glancing at them behind the blue silk veil; or being swept away unexpectedly into the whirl of a country dance in the course of which Madame Cabot's bonnet became badly demoralised; or being pressingly invited to drink beer by an hilarious party of young men and women, whose recommendations were evidently the outcome of experience:—after sundry vicissitudes of this kind, all of which greatly amused the Marquise and made her laugh heartily—the two ladies became weary of keeping their feet amidst so much jostle and uproar, and sought out a spot where they might sit down and contemplate the spectacle at their leisure. With this purpose they made their way to a range of boxes or cabinets, facing upon a large open space, and connected behind with an establishment for the supply of rack-punch and ham sand-

wiches. Having rented the right of sole occupancy of one these boxes for the evening, they made themselves as comfortable in it as the narrow and angular fashion of the chairs permitted. The lamps flaring on the front of the box left the interior in comparative shadow; and the seclusion could be increased by drawing some flimsy red curtains, which dangled from a brass rod across the entrance. Other parties were in the adjoining boxes on either side, and their conversation was indistinctly audible on the background of the prevailing hubbub.

Perdita moved her chair into the right-hand corner, in order that she might eke out the accommodation of her chair by leaning against the partition. After she had remained for some time in this position, her eyes wandering over the multi-form elements of the unorganised drama before her she became aware that some one was speaking on the other side of the thin boarding that separated her from the next cabinet. Words and parts of sentences were here and there distinguishable; but these would have had no interest for Perdita, had she not suddenly made the discovery that the voice was one which she knew. Several moments passed, however, before she was able to connect the voice, in her mind, with the person

to whom it belonged. It was a woman's voice, rather low, but with a penetrative quality in it—a peculiar voice, both in timbre and intonation. Whose was it? It was, of course, impossible for Perdita to see the speaker, unless she had gone outside for the purpose. Possibly her curiosity might ultimately have led her to do this; but she was saved the trouble by presently recollecting that the speaker in question was none other than Marion Lancaster.

At first, though it surprised her, the discovery did not especially startle the Marquise. There was nothing wonderful in Philip's taking his wife to see Vauxhall, although it might not be the place which a newly married couple of their rank and disposition would most naturally visit. At this point, however, it occurred to Perdita, with the thrill of a genuine sensation, that Philip could not be there. He was out of town, having taken the coach that afternoon to St. Albans to meet the Earl of Seabridge, who had written to make the appointment on a matter of business. This Perdita happened to know, because Philip had stopped at her house in the morning to present her with an illustrated edition of "Iduna," which had just come out; and had then mentioned that he was on his way northward, and would not

return before the evening of the following day. It was the first night that he had been separated from his wife since their marriage. That Marion should have chosen that very night to go to Vauxhall was, therefore, fairly remarkable. For what purpose could she have come? Was Mrs. Lockhart with her? Could Philip have been aware of her intention?

Though the solution of these problems was none of Perdita's business, she nevertheless listened very intently in the hope of hearing something that might elucidate them. It was impossible to make out anything consecutive, the rather since what Marion said was in detached sentences, and the replies of her companion, who was apparently a female servant, were of a like character. The following bits of dialogue, however, seemed to detach themselves from the medley:—

"I fear he has not come," said Marion.

"'Tis early yet, ma'am," replied the other. "Maybe he . . ." The rest was inaudible.

"Be sure you tell me if you see anyone I know," Marion said, after a while: "it must never be known . . ."

"No one 'ud know you, ma'am . . . so you can be easy on that score."

". . . cannot stay here much longer. If he

does not appear soon . . . it might come to the knowledge of my husband, and . . ."

Here the fragmentary sentences ceased altogether to be distinguishable, Marion having apparently removed to another part of her box. But Perdita had heard enough to convince her that something out of the common was going on. Marion had come secretly to Vauxhall, taking advantage of her husband's absence, in order to meet some gentleman who had not yet made his appearance. So much was evident, and it was enough to place Marion in a light which, to say the best of it, was ambiguous. Perdita knew not what to make of it, Though not prone to be over-charitable in her judgments on her own sex, the Marquise was too keen a reader of character ever to have supposed that Marion was capable of an immoral intrigue. Yet here was certainly an intrigue, and it was difficult to see how it could be altogether an innocent one. Perdita, in fact, made no special effort in this direction; what puzzled her was that a woman of Marion's intelligence should have chosen Vauxhall, of all places in the world, to meet a lover in. True, there is a certain kind of safety in a crowd; and there might be particular circumstances rendering Vauxhall a desirable trysting-place in this instance: and,

in short, there is never any accounting for affairs of this kind on logical grounds: they are controlled by too many unknown and unknowable conditions. A more interesting matter of speculation regarded the identity of the man whom Marion had favoured with her preference. He could not well be handsomer than Philip, Perdita thought, or cleverer, or, in a general way, more attractive. But, of course, Marion must be of a different opinion. Who, then, was to her mind the superior? The Marquise rapidly reviewed the names and characters of the various gentlemen with whom Marion was likely to be on confidential terms; but one seemed about as likely as another, and none of them, to say the truth, seemed likely at all. In the midst of her perplexity, Marion and her attendant were heard to rise, and a minute later they came out of their box and walked away slowly, looking about them. It was Marion, beyond a doubt, and the attendant was a middle-aged woman in whom Perdita fancied she recognised Mrs. Lancaster's private maid, who had been formerly a servant of Mrs. Lockhart.

For a moment, Perdita had an impulse to issue forth and follow them, and see the end of the adventure. But a regard for her own dignity, as well as a sentiment of respect for another

woman's secret, combined to restrain her. It was enough to know that Marion had a mystery of this kind to conceal: and possibly (such is the waywardness of the moral sense) the revelation of that fact raised, rather than lowered, Marion in Perdita's esteem. That a woman of Marion's apparently passionate candour and simplicity should all the time be hiding so hazardous a secret, evinced a force and depth of character such as Perdita had not been prepared for. She was a woman to be reckoned with; and the Marquise admitted to herself with a curious smile that, with all her own keenness and knowledge of the world, she had been totally mistaken in her judgment of her.

And yet, after all, might not the mistake be in supposing herself to have been mistaken? Might not Marion be the innocent victim of appearances? Could her presence there be merely the result of a thoughtless frolic, as was the case with Perdita herself? But against this view was to be set the conclusive testimony of the passages of conversation she had overheard. She had not overheard much, to be sure; but much or little, it had been conclusive so far as it went; it had proved that Marion came to Vauxhall to meet some man. What man? Was there any man whom she could meet

innocently? Perdita could think of none. Stay! Might it not be Merton Fillmore?

It was to the last degree improbable, and contrary to reason; but it might nevertheless be Fillmore, and if so, the occasion of their meeting must be business and not love: for Perdita was tolerably convinced that she knew where Merton Fillmore's heart was. But what business, that could not be better discussed in Fillmore's office, or in Marion's house, could there be between them? For what likelihood was there that a man would go to Vauxhall on any consideration? There was no likelihood of it. It could not be Fillmore, and yet it must be Fillmore: Perdita wished it to be Fillmore: though whether she wished it because of Fillmore, or because of Marion, or because of herself, she could not perhaps have told.

This episode, be the significance and upshot of it what they might, had loomed so large as to obscure whatever other grotesque entertainment Vauxhall might have contained for the Marquise Desmoines; and, moreover, the sight of Marion's rashness had impelled her seriously to reflect upon her own. She resolved to go home without delay; and having tied her veil more closely about her face, and roused Madame Cabot, who had

asleep in her corner of the box, with her snuff-box open on her lap, she took that lady's bony arm, and they went forth into the assemblage.

Their progress was not so rapid as they could have wished. The rack-punch and other drinkables had made the crowd more noisy and boisterous, while the numbers had certainly not diminished. Perdita had need of all her wits and courage to avoid getting into trouble, while Madame Cabot was thoroughly frightened, and gave frequent vent to dismal little shrieks and moans, which had the effect of attracting the attention which Perdita was so anxious to avoid. All at once, in the midst of the general turmoil, some loud cries were heard, and there was a rush in the direction whence they proceeded. "A fight! a fight!" cried one gentleman, pressing forward enthusiastically. "A fight?—'tis a murder!" returned another. "'Tis nought but a fellow in a fit," said a third, who had mounted on a lamp-post. "He's drunk! put him out, stifle me!" exclaimed another, with the righteous indignation of inebriety. "Come along, Jack—'tis no business of ours," remarked a gorgeously attired female, seizing her companion by the arm. Meanwhile Perdita and Madame Cabot were taking advantage of the rush of the crowd in one direction to

push their way in the other, which was comparatively deserted. By a roundabout way they were approaching the entrance, and had just passed a guardian of the peace, who was thoughtfully proceeding in a direction at right angles to the scene of the disturbance, when Perdita suddenly stopped short, much to Madame Cabot's distress, and fixed her eyes upon a group that was also hastening towards the gate from another part of the grounds.

It consisted of a man and two women. The former was fashionably dressed, had rather a dandified air, and a handsome, bright, good-humoured countenance. The lady on his arm was tall, and of a fine figure; her face, which was uncovered, had a flush of excitement upon it, and her eyes sparkled. Close behind the couple followed a woman who was evidently a domestic. Perdita had no difficulty in recognising Marion, and that elegant poet and fascinating man of the world, Mr. Thomas Moore. As they passed her, she gave another of her odd little smiles.

"So much for my charity!" she murmured to herself. "Poor Philip!—allons, madame!" And she hurried Madame Cabot to the carriage.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next day London awoke to a sensation. As early as ten o'clock in the morning, it was known that something astounding had happened; though the general public still lacked information as to what it was. Had Bonaparte escaped from St. Helena, and landed at Gravesend? Was his Majesty George the Third dead at last? Had the Pope been proclaimed spiritual and temporal ruler of Great Britain? Or had another Gunpowder Plot been discovered? City men, meeting one another on their way to their shops and offices, asked each other such questions, half jocosely, half in earnest. The people on the street caught up echoes of these dialogues, and spread them about with amplifications and variations. Up till noon, only a handful of persons knew the truth; but before sunset it was familiar in the mouths of millions. The great banking house of Bendibow Brothers had failed.

Yes, after a career of almost unparalleled

success and splendour, the mighty structure, founded, nearly a century ago, by grim Abraham Bendibow, had fallen with a crash, and thousands of hapless people were involved in the ruin. Financial England was shaken to its foundations by that catastrophe: on the Continent, the news created only less dismay; but in London itself the destruction wrought by it was terribly widespread and apparent. By order of the Government, which received early information of what had happened, a company of soldiers was sent down to guard the bank—a wise precaution, as the threatening crowd that soon began to gather in front of it proved. A very ugly and turbulent crowd it was, as London mobs are apt to be; and in this case its passions were inflamed by the presence in the midst of it of numbers of luckless depositors, who had lost all they possessed, and were shrieking for vengeance. Was such enormous robbery to be perpetrated, and the guilty not to suffer? A scapegoat was wanted, and must be had. And who was the thief? Who, but Sir Francis Bendibow? Where was Sir Francis Bendibow? Where was the man who had made himself rich and fat on the life-blood of thousands of honest men and women? Was he in the bank? The captain of the company assured the questioners

that he was not; that the bank contained nothing but money, and very little of that; and this, in due time, would be fairly divided among those who could show a claim to it. For the rest, he had orders to fire should any act of violence be attempted; and he was ready to obey his orders. Hereupon the mob laughed, as if the defiance pleased them; but it was evident that a few score of soldiers would not be a mouthful for such a roaring multitude, should they choose to attack. At this juncture, however, a fresh suggestion was disseminated, none knew how; but it was caught up at once. Sir Francis Bendibow owned a town mansion, only a mile or two distant. Why not look for him there? That was a more likely place to find him; and if he were gone, at all events the house and its contents would remain, and be at the mob's disposal. Away, then, to the Bendibow mansion! There were no naked bayonets and loaded musket-barrels there; but there were valuables of all kinds to smash or to purloin, and possibly there were provisions in the larder and wines in the cellar. So off to Francis Bendibow's!

In a surprisingly short time the vast mass of men had begun to move in the direction of their new object, sweeping everything before them,

and gaining new recruits at every street corner. Along the Strand they poured, a seething and howling torrent of lawless humanity, swollen continually by confluent streaming down the narrow streets from the north; more than half of them, no doubt, ignorant whither they were bound, or wherefore they were gathered together, but all alike ready for mischief and exulting in disorder. Meantime the warning of their approach preceded them, and shopkeepers hurriedly put up their shutters, and householders barred their doors. Westward they roared along, appalling to see and hear, and yet grotesquely fascinating, insomuch that law-abiding and respectable citizens, beholding them, were seized with a strange longing to cast themselves into the irresistible current, to imbibe its purpose and join in its achievements. Alas for Francis Bendibow, should he fall into the clutches of these his fellow-creatures!

As the front of the mob entered the street in which the Bendibow mansion stood, a hackney carriage was being driven rapidly out of it in the opposite direction. Before it could turn the corner, a stone, flung at random, struck the driver on the head, and knocked him off the box. At this mishap the mob set up a jeering howl, and a number of them rushed forward to see what

game they had brought down. But hereupon the door of the carriage opened, and a man got out, wearing a heavy-caped cloak: an elderly man, but stout and broad-shouldered. The collar of his cloak was turned up, and the brim of his hat drawn down over his forehead, so that little of his face was visible. This man, after casting a glance towards the crowd, mounted quickly on the box, and, gathering up the reins with a practised hand, laid the whip sharply across the horse's back. A ragged scarecrow sprang at the animal's bit with outstretched hand, but the lash of the whip smote him across the eyes, and he staggered back with a shriek of agony. The vehicle was now at the street corner; but, before turning it, the man on the box, taking the reins in his left hand, passed his right beneath his cloak, and drew forth a long pistol. He levelled it at the thick of the crowd, which was now swarming before the doomed house, and fired. The ball passed through the neck of a gigantic ruffian who had just smashed one of the front windows of the mansion, and buried itself in the heart of a pallid stripling a couple of yards farther on, who had been swept along in the rush, against his own will, and without the least notion of what all the uproar

was about. Both the stricken men fell; and the hackney carriage and its driver disappeared.

All this had passed so rapidly that few were aware it had occurred, or knew whence the shots came, or what damage they had done; and all eyes and thoughts being now centred on the house, no pursuit of the fugitive was attempted. The house, of course, had never been designed to stand a siege, nor did there seem to be any garrison to defend it: the doors and windows were speedily battered in, and the mob, meeting with no resistance and seeing no adversaries, crowded in pellmell, and the work of sack and destruction began. It was speedily apparent, however, that the amount of the spoil was altogether out of proportion with the number of the spoilers—so much so that at least nine-tenths of the latter must needs come off, not only empty-handed, but without even the gratification of having destroyed anything. In half an hour the lately splendid residence of the proprietor of the greatest private banking-house in London was gutted from cellar to ridge pole, and such of its contents as could profitably be stolen had passed through the hands of hundreds of temporary possessors, one snatching from another, until everything had vanished, it was impossible to say where, and none—save

those who had been crushed, beaten, trampled, or torn within an inch of their lives or less—were in the slightest degree satisfied. In this predicament, a very obvious resource presented itself. If Sir Francis Bendibow's house could not fill the mob's pockets, there were in London plenty of similar houses which might, in the aggregate, realise the desired end: a good beginning had been made here; why not go on and sack all Belgravia? The suggestion had only to be made to be acted upon; and in a few minutes more the whole vast crowd was in full cry towards Pall Mall. Here, however, an unexpected and chilling obstacle presented itself. The Duke of Wellington, who happened to have come over from Paris for a few days, and had received information of the disturbance, had shortly before despatched a battery of artillery in that direction; and as the mob swept round the corner of the Haymarket, they found themselves almost on the gaping muzzles of half a dozen big cannon, the same that had mowed down the French at Waterloo, and which seemed cordially disposed to do as much for the cockney roughs in Pall Mall. An amazing scene of confusion followed, those behind being as yet ignorant of the passionate desire of those in front to get out of the way; and the

confusion was kindled into a wild panic when the tramp of horses was heard on the left, and the black plumes and glancing breastplates of a hundred heavy dragoons were seen charging at a brisk trot upon the flank of the rioters. This charge, and the accompanying arrest of many of the ringleaders, dispersed the mob even more quickly than it had been assembled; it plunged headlong wherever an opening presented itself, and its wicked old mother, London, swallowed it up; as Spenser's monster swallowed her filthy offspring at the attack of the Red Cross Knight. All mobs are cowardly: but the London mob is the most cowardly of all, because it is the least excitable, and is without convictions.

While these matters were in progress, the hackney-carriage had gone on its way unmolested, and, having reached Oxford Street, turned eastward, and rattled along swiftly towards the city. It was now nearly four o'clock, and the early London dusk had begun to settle over the dingy streets. The driver sat erect and square on the box, turning his head neither to the right nor left, but occasionally touching the horse smartly with the whip. To look at him, one would have supposed him to be absorbed in a gloomy reverie: he scarcely seemed to notice where he was

going. Presently, however, he turned down a street to the right; and in ten minutes more drew up in front of the office of Mr. Merton Fillmore, Solicitor, in the neighbourhood of Cornhill. Throwing the reins on the tired animal's back, he got leisurely down from his seat, and, with his hat-brim still pulled down over his brows, he entered the doorway and went upstairs.

He was about to lay his hand on the handle of the office door when it was opened from within, and Fillmore, with his hat and top-coat on, stepped across the threshold, but stopped short on seeing his visitor. For a moment he stood silent and motionless: then he grasped him by the arm and drew him into the office, where the clerks were locking up their desks, and across it into the inner room, closing the door behind them.

"Well, Bendibow, I'm glad you have escaped," he said. "I sent after you to the bank and to your house this forenoon, but you were at neither place. Where did you spend the night?"

"At an inn in Pimlico."

"Your house is probably in ruins by this time."

The baronet took a pistol from beneath his cloak, and showed Fillmore that it had been discharged. "I just came from there," he

remarked. "I gave an account of two or three of 'em, first."

"Of course you know your life is in danger?"

"I'm dangerous myself," replied the other, with a short laugh.

"You had better lose no time in getting out of London."

"Not I! I'm satisfied. I shall give myself up."

"That may be the best thing you can do. Did you know this was coming on?"

"I suppose so. It had to come some time. I haven't known much, one way or another, lately. If Tom had been alive, I should have tried to stave it off. It's all one to me now, damn 'em! I wish I could have ruined all England."

"You have done enough, Bendibow. What was the cause of this?"

The baronet laughed again. "The cause of it? Ask the historians of the eighteenth century. If Abraham Bendibow had never succeeded, I never should have failed. It was bound to happen from the beginning. Have you got anything to drink, Fillmore?"

The lawyer shook his head. "And you had better let brandy alone for the present," he said.

"Your head has not been right, as it is, for the last four months."

"My head will last my time," said Sir Francis, carelessly. "I can bring my wits together when there's need for it. Four months, is it? Should have thought it was four days—or a century! Tom is dead . . . did you know that? You don't know what killed him, though! Well, give me something to eat, then: I'm hungry."

Fillmore opened the door, and ordered the clerk to bring some bread and meat from the neighbouring tavern. Sir Francis sat heavily down at the table, and supported his head between his hands. He was greatly changed from the courtly and fastidious baronet of last summer. There was something coarse and reckless about him. The germ of it had always been there, perhaps; but it had been kept out of sight till now. Fillmore leaned in thought against the mantelpiece with his arms folded. After a while the clerk came in, with the bread and meat. He put it before Sir Francis, who roused himself and began to eat ravenously. When he had finished, he leaned back in his chair, and fixed his eyes upon the solicitor.

"You're a good fellow, after, all, Fillmore," he said. "I'll tell you all about it: 'twill be known

soon enough, without my telling. Ever hear of Rackett's?"

"The gambling house in Jermyn Street?"

"That's it. Well, that was Bendibow Brothers—that was the real place. It brought me in hundreds per cent., where the bank brought me in tens. We should have gone down long ago if it hadn't been for Rackett's. But the devil was in it all."

"I knew you had something of the sort going on; but you never chose to explain, and I didn't care to make inquiries. But I never thought of Rackett's. 'Tis the most scandalous place in London."

"'Tis nothing now, but four walls and a bailiff. Scandalous, eh? Well, so it was! I've had there, in one night, the Price of Wales, Brummel, Fox, Rivers, Aubrey, and Denis O'Kelly. Dick England—do you remember him? He was a great pal of mine a score of years ago. Tippoo Smith—he was another. Egad, I had 'em all! They never knew where their money went to—except those who were in the secret: never suspected Frank Bendibow of having any connection with such scandalous doings! We had Lady Kendall of Ross there once; and we made his lordship pay one

hundred thousand pounds down to save my lady's reputation. Dear at the price, wasn't it?"

"Ay, you were a clever man, Bendibow. And in nothing more clever than in the way you kept your connection with this business concealed. Something was always suspected, but nothing was known."

"No, nothing was known. Do you know the reason? 'Twas because I knew how to choose men, and how to make them work for me. Frank Bendibow was a Napoleon, in his own way; but he's had his Waterloo! The only one who ever found me out was that jade Perdita; and she forced me to pay her ten thousand pounds for it, when I could easier have spared her as many drops of my heart's blood. I was a fool not to have taken her into partnership ten years ago instead of marrying her to that French imbecile. She is worth more than the best dozen men I ever came across, begad!"

"She is worth too much ever to have mixed herself up in any such thievish business," said Fillmore sternly.

"Maybe she is: 'tis all over now," returned the other carelessly. "I'm glad to be at the end of it. They've been bothering me for weeks past, curse 'em! bringing me their fears and complaints,

and asking me what they should do. I bade them go to the devil; I had other things to think about. If Tom had been alive . . . well, no matter! I believe that scoundrel, Catnip, that I took out of the street, damme, and had in my own office, and made a prosperous man of—I believe he was the one who betrayed us. You call me a swindler, Merton Fillmore; but if every man had been as square as I've been, I wouldn't be here now."

"You are what I would have been under the same conditions," said Fillmore. "I neither condemn nor praise any man. Had you warning of the crash yesterday?"

"At ten o'clock last night, at Vauxhall."

"At Vauxhall?"

"That surprises you, eh? 'Twas our trysting-place, where we met to concoct our nefarious schemes, as they say in the play; and the safest one we could have chosen. Well, I thought I was ready for anything; but when they told me that, I called out, and struck the fellow down, and I don't know what happened for a while after that. Here's a queer thing: I had a notion I saw that Lockhart girl—the one that married Lancaster—just before I dropped; and again, at the inn, I thought I heard her voice. At the inn I awoke this morning, and that's all I know about it.

Faces and voices sometimes come before a man that way, when he's a bit beside himself. But what made me think of her, eh?" He arose as he spoke and began to button up his cloak.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" asked Fillmore.

"All? No. That's all at present. The words in which I tell you all—you, or any one else—will be the last words that Frank Bendibow speaks. What do you care? What does anybody care? Let 'em find out, if they can. I shall be there; I am not going to run away, as Grantley did."

"You must come home and spend the night with me."

"No; my board and lodging will be at the expense of the Government from this day on. Say what you like of Rackett's, there was virtue enough in it to secure me that, at any rate. Thank you all the same, Fillmore; you're the last man I shall ever give thanks to. Well, I'm off. Good day to you."

"Where are you going?"

Bendibow named the station at which he proposed to surrender himself.

"If you are resolved to go, I will drive you there," said Fillmore. "But you had better accept my invitation, for one night at least."

The baronet shook his head. "My liabilities are heavy enough already; I am not going to risk being the cause of your house being used as mine has been. I'm poison; but I can prevent your taking me."

And with this jest he led the way out of the office.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT had been Fillmore's intention to call on Perdita the next morning, and acquaint her with the details of what had happened. She was, theoretically at all events, nearly interested in the matter. She was Bendibow's adopted daughter, and his credit or disgrace must more or less affect her. She might desire to take some action about the affair, and, as Bendibow was already in the hands of the authorities, and seemed inclined to be somewhat outspoken, there was no time to be lost. Whatever defence of the unfortunate baronet was to be attempted, would naturally be entrusted to Fillmore; and it was necessary that he should be acquainted

with the views and wishes of all concerned. Perdita, moreover, was capable not only of having desires, but of suggesting ingenious and practical methods of accomplishing them: and though Fillmore was not accustomed to ask advice from his clients, or to accept it when offered, he was ready to make an exception in Perdita's case. She had brains, sound judgment, and quickness of wit superior to Fillmore's own—more elastic and adaptable. Furthermore, the lawyer was in love with the lady, and was not the man to forego any opportunity of strengthening his relations with her. He had resolved never to give her up, and in order to carry out that resolve, it was indispensable, in the case of a woman like Perdita, to use every advantage at his disposal.

He had arranged to make his call as early as ten o'clock, which, after all, was not so early seventy years ago as it is now. But fortune, who often leads men to destruction by simply improving the grade of the path they are already inclined to travel, so arranged events that Fillmore received, while he was yet at breakfast, a short note from the Marquise herself, despatched to him from her bedchamber by special messenger, requesting his speedy presence at her house. "You will know, without my telling you, why I want

to speak to you," she wrote; "and I sent to you thus early, so that you may be able to come before you go to the city. I shall be expecting you by nine o'clock. Pardon my haste and informality, *mon ami*: I have confidence in you."

This communication no doubt improved the lawyer's appetite, and imparted a more exquisite flavour to the coffee that he quaffed from the delicate cup of painted Meissen porcelain. He allowed the little note to remain open on the table beside him; he scrutinised its curious chirography, at once rounded and sharp, bold, characteristic, and yet difficult to read. A faint, very faint perfume emanated from it, reminding him of the writer; her lovely hand had rested upon this paper; her breath had touched it. The lawyer bent down, perhaps to examine it more closely. . . . At that moment the servant entered, to inquire when Mr. Fillmore wanted his carriage. Mr. Fillmore raised his head quickly, hemmed, pulled up his collar, and replied that fifteen minutes before nine would be time enough. The servant withdrew, and Fillmore, glancing at the mirror opposite, detected an unmistakable blush on his ordinarily pale cheeks. He bit his lip; then, catching up the letter, he kissed it and put it in his pocket.

At five minutes past nine he arrived at the Marquise's house, and was immediately ushered into a charming ante-room adjoining the lady's chamber. In a few minutes the door of the latter opened, and the Marquise appeared. She had on a flowing dressing-gown of white cachemire lined with quilted satin and bordered with flowers worked in gold thread. Her bright reddish hair was drawn up to the top of her head, revealing the beautiful line and pose of her white neck; and her slender feet, encased in bronze slippers and open-work silk stockings, peeped out beneath the embroidered hem of her petticoat. She was fresh and rosy from her bath, and had all the fragrance and loveliness of a sweet-petalled flower.

She put her warm hand in the lawyer's cool, firm clasp, smiled upon him, and bade him be seated. "You are very good to come to me so promptly," she said, "and to show my appreciation of your courtesy, I will proceed to business at once, and give you your liberty as soon as possible. You have not been able to see Sir Francis, I suppose? I know that he has been arrested."

"He gave himself up voluntarily," said Fillmore. "He had ample opportunity to escape, if

he had wished it. I offered to help him off; but he refused."

"You . . .? You did see him, then?"

"He came to my office in the midst of the disturbance."

Perdita's dark, sparkling eyes fixed themselves steadfastly upon the lawyer. "In that case," she said slowly, "he probably told you . . . Will you tell me all that passed?"

Fillmore complied, and Perdita listened to his story with close attention. After it was told, she sat for a while with her forefinger against her chin, meditating.

"I don't know whether to be pleased or displeased," she remarked, at length. "'Tis rather exciting, at all events. I knew about Rackett's, and all that: I knew more than he ever suspected. But I thought he was clever enough to secure himself. I'm not sure but I might have helped him, if he had applied to me."

"Even if your means would have sufficed, he was past helping."

"I should have done it for my own sake, not for his," said Perdita, with a smile of cynical candour. "I care for what happens to him only as it may affect me. You won't be obliged, sir, to remodel your estimate of my character on the idea

that I am given to self-sacrifice. And I should certainly not begin with Sir Francis. On the contrary!"

"I understand. You think his disgrace may affect you?"

"I only fear that he may not be disgraced enough."

"I don't understand so well as I thought."

"You do your understanding injustice. If Sir Francis was a villain from the beginning, I am comfortable. If that old story about him and my father should turn out to my father's credit, then I should be the daughter of an honest man, who was wickedly abused; and that will be to my advantage. If this man who was lately murdered proves to have been really my father, all the better. The opposite alternatives would be what I should not like. Now, as Sir Francis has given himself up, 'tis likely he means to make a full confession: and meanwhile I'm in suspense. What is your opinion about him?"

"I have been on friendly terms with him for a good many years."

"And you mean to stick by him, right or wrong?"

"As against people in general—yes."

"Does that mean that you are going to sacrifice your conscience only in special cases?"

"I could do anything to serve you," said Fillmore, with measured emphasis.

"And I am to consider it a compliment if you betray an old friend to please a new acquaintance? You are severe, Mr. Fillmore!"

She said this smilingly, but the lawyer could not tell whether she was offended, or was only teasing him. If he had needed any assurance that she was not a woman to be easily duped by flattery, he had it now. He had intended merely to indicate that he would not lightly be false to a trust, but she had contrived to make him imply nearly the reverse. His real sentiments in the matter were, in fact, honourable enough, though he was sensible of a fatal fascination about Perdita, stronger than the attractions of virtue. For a moment he hesitated, undecided whether to draw back now and finally, or to go on.

"Do you give me up?" asked Perdita, with a little laugh.

"Never!" said he, with a feeling that he was pledging himself rather for the possibilities of the future than for anything in the present. "Not that there is anything in this affair to impair the most sensitive principles," he added, smiling. "Pro-

fessional etiquette is the most I have to consider, and that is not involved in the present question. As I was saying, I have been in the way of knowing a good deal about Bendibow, and my opinion is that the more complete his confession is, the less cause you will have for anxiety. At the same time, from something he let fall, I doubt whether his confession will be entirely without reserve."

"What will he hold back?"

"I know of nothing in particular."

"Anything about the murder of my father, for instance?"

"Do you suspect him of knowing anything about that?" demanded Fillmore, feeling astonished.

"One cannot help seeing that if the robber had been able to rifle his victim's pockets, and had taken away that packet among other things, it would have been convenient for Sir Francis."

"But if the contents of the packet were compromising to anyone, the thief would have demanded a ransom——"

"Which the person compromised would have paid—if he had not already paid it in advance," said Perdita, composedly.

"I don't think Bendibow had it in him to go such lengths," said Fillmore, after a long pause.

"Besides, the fact that his son was killed at the same time"

"It was a dark night," remarked Perdita. "However, I don't really believe it, either. But I've made up my mind that I want that packet. Sir Francis' confession may agree with it; or—'tis just possible—he may try to tell a different story, in which event the packet might be useful."

"Very true. The packet is still in Mrs. Lancaster's possession, is it not?"

"I gave it to her, for fear of my own curiosity. But 'tis another thing now. I must know what is in it. And soon!"

"Shall I get it for you?"

"If you will be so kind. . . . No, on the whole, I think you had better not. Under the circumstances, Mrs. Lancaster would probably prefer to have me apply to her directly. But, when I have got it, I shall want to consult with you about it."

"You may command me at any time, madame."

Perdita rose, and the lawyer, though he would gladly have stayed longer, had no choice but to rise also. "Sir," said the Marquise, after contemplating him a moment, "I wish you would be consistent!"

Fillmore bowed, somewhat apprehensively, for although Perdita had given him to know that she was not afraid of him, he was beginning to be a little afraid of her. Perceiving that he did not catch her drift, she explained herself.

"You are one of the most agreeable and sensible men I ever met, on all points but one," she said. "Be sensible on that too!"

"You might as well ask me not to be sensible to hunger or to fire," he replied, drawing a deep breath and looking upon her with a sort of sullen ardour.

"I have kept a part of my promise to you," continued the Marquise; "I have showed you something of what I really am. There is nothing to love here"—she laid her finger on her breast—"for beauty alone is not lovable to a man like you. And you have intellect enough: you need something besides intellect in a wife: and that something is just what I can never give."

"You have it to give," interrupted Fillmore, "whether you give it to me or not."

"And what most annoys me," she went on, "is that unless you come to your senses soon, I shall cease to like you, and therefore to be able to make use of you. So if you really care for me, you must not love me any more."

"It is no use," said Fillmore, with a slow movement of his head: and, without awaiting any further argument, he took his leave.

"And now for you, Master Philip!" said the Marquise to herself, when she was alone. What she intended by such an exclamation there was nothing to indicate: but she called her maid, and having disembarrassed herself of her dressing-gown, she proceeded rapidly to complete her toilet, and gave orders for her carriage to be at the door at half past ten. A few minutes later she was being driven in the direction of the Lancasters' house.

At this juncture, however, fortune again interposed to hasten matters, by bringing Philip to the corner of Hanover Square just as the Marquise's carriage was entering it. He recognised the livery, and paused, raising his hat; but she had already caught sight of him, and the carriage drew up to the sidewalk. Philip appeared at the door, wearing a rather grave face. Perdita greeted him with radiant composure. His dejection recovered a little under this tonic; and when she followed it up by inviting him to take a seat beside her, he felt better, and complied. By a flash of memory, Perdita recollected a former occasion on which she had entreated him to do the same thing, and he

had refused; although then he had been a single man, whereas now he was married; this recollection made the Marquise smile secretly. Meanwhile Philip took his seat in total unsuspectingness of what was passing in her mind.

"Tell me where you want to go," she said, "and I'll drive you there."

"I was going to call on you."

"How charmingly attentive of you! In that case . . . suppose we carry out my original intention of—driving round the Park."

"It would give me great pleasure," he answered; whereupon she gave the direction to the coachman.

"Have you a new poem to read to me?" she asked.

"I haven't written a line for six weeks. I was coming about this Bendibow affair. Of course you've heard of it?"

"That his house was ransacked and he arrested—yes."

"Well; my wife . . . we thought you might want those papers that you left with my wife. There's no knowing what may happen, you know."

"You haven't got them with you?"

"Here they are," he answered, producing the packet.

"They may be needed; there's no telling as you say. It was very kind of your wife—of you, that is, to think of it. You are all well and happy—that goes without saying?"

"Oh, yes; Marion is not very well this morning, though."

"Indeed! What ails her?"

"A headache, I believe. I don't know. I was away for a day or two, and she has not been quite herself since I came back."

"Surely that's only what might be expected, after being deprived of you so long!"

"Perhaps so," said Philip, laconically.

"We poor women, you know, are not permitted to amuse ourselves when our lords are away. We can only stay at home until they come back."

"That's the principle, but not always the practice," said Philip, with a grim look.

"You have not found it out?" exclaimed the Marquise in a startled tone; and then, as if perceiving that she had committed herself, she hurriedly added, "Of course principle and practice must always differ more or less. Human beings aren't made by rule of thumb."

Philip at first made no reply, but a painful

expression passed over his face, leaving it gloomier than before. At length, he said, "I'm not a man who lets himself be blindfolded to save trouble. You and I have known each other some time, Perdita. Will you answer me truly—will you tell me what you know? for I see you do know something."

"I'm not likely to forget the past," answered the beautiful Marquise; "I shall remember it at least as long as this scar lasts"—and as she spoke she placed her hand on the upper part of her bosom. "But it is never true friendship to interfere between husband and wife. If you see anything that troubles you, give it the best interpretation possible, and forget it. Very likely—most likely—there is no harm in it. One must not expect, or wish, to know all the secrets even of the person they have married. Does Marion know all yours?"

"I thank you for your advice," said Philip, in a tone that intimated that he did not mean to follow it. "It seems you are aware that my wife spent a night away from home. Probably you also know where, and with whom. I shall know that in time; but I would rather learn it from you than from anyone else."

"I could tell you nothing that would really

enlighten you, Philip. Your best security for your wife's conduct is the good you know of her. Be satisfied with that. It was enough to make you marry her. It should be enough to make you happy in your marriage."

"Yes, I know all that!" said Philip, impatiently. After a short silence, he added, turning towards her, "You are a true friend, Perdita. May I come and talk to you sometimes? The world is a lonely place!"

"If I can make it less lonely for you—come!" she answered.

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANWHILE the inscrutable Providence, whose apparent neglect of the affairs of men is only less remarkable than its seeming interference with them, had declared that those affairs with which we are at present occupied should be dignified by the participation in them of Lady Flanders. For, at about the hour when Philip and Perdita were driving in the Park, discussing the former's domestic situation, Mr. Thomas Moore was calling

upon the elderly aristocrat, and the conversation between them was taking a similar direction.

Precisely what passed on this occasion it is unnecessary at this moment to inquire; but the reader may be reminded that Mr. Moore was a gentleman, and incapable of wantonly betraying any lady's confidence; and he may further be informed that the genial poet's acquaintance with Lady Flanders was intimate and of old standing. Her attitude towards him was, indeed, of a quasi-maternal character; and in the present instance his communications, whatever they were, were prompted in great measure by his recognition of her great social influence, and by the fact that her declared opinion, favourable or unfavourable, of any person, was apt to go a long way towards making or marring that person's social reputation. When Mr. Moore left her ladyship's presence, she patted him on the shoulder and called him a good boy; and he issued from her door with the light of conscious virtue glistering on his ingenuous forehead.

Next morning Lady Flanders arose early, and in the course of her toilet preparations she fell into chat, as her custom was, with her maid Christine, an attractive young person of German extraction, deft of hand and soothing of voice, who could design and elevate a head-dress in a

manner to please the most exacting elderly aristocrat imaginable. Christine was a great favourite with her mistress, and was the only human being of either sex to whom that lady was uniformly indulgent and good-humoured. Christine, for her part, was much attached to Lady Flanders; but, with the perversity and short-sightedness of persons in her enviable condition of life, she had lately taken it into her head to lose her heart; and the individual who had won it was a Mr. Catnip, whose name has been once or twice mentioned in this history, as a servant of Sir Francis Bendibow. It would appear that Christine and her cavalier had met to enjoy each other's society the evening previous; and Mr. Catnip had at that time confided to Christine a curious circumstance which had happened to come under his observation the day before at Vauxhall. After Christine had repeated to her mistress the main points of Mr. Catnip's story, her ladyship interrupted her.

"Of course you understand, Christine," she said, "that I am convinced, to begin with, that your Catnip has been telling you a pack of lies, and that there's not a word of truth in the tale from beginning to end. 'Tis very foolish of you to have anything at all to say to such a fellow,

and my advice to you is to drop him at once. Is he willing to make affidavit that 'twas really the Marquise Desmoines he saw there?"

"Oh, yiss, madame! He stand close by de box on which Madame la Marquise sit, and he recognise de ring on her finger, and her tone as she speak with her companion. They sit on de box next to Madame Lancaster."

"Could she and Mrs. Lancaster see each other?"

"Not whiles dey sit so; but soon Madame Lancaster get up and go out in front, and den Madame la Marquise . . ."

"Ay, ay: a mighty pretty story! And so then Sir Francis fainted away, did he, and Mrs. Lancaster got a carriage, and Catnip followed it? . . . Upon my word, Christine, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to listen to such trash; much more to repeat it to me. Take care you never open your mouth about it to anyone else, that's all."

"Oh, not in de least, madame."

"There, that'll do. Now go and tell Withers that I shall want the carriage immediately after breakfast. And, Christine . . . put in order the bedroom and the sitting-soom on the second floor:

I'm expecting some one to spend the night. Don't forget."

"I shall take care of it, madame."

Lady Flanders went down to breakfast, ate with a good appetite, and having put on her bonnet and cloak she got into her carriage and was driven to the Marquise Desmoines'. The latter received her august visitor with some surprise, for Lady Flanders had not hitherto shown much disposition to cultivate intimate relations with the beautiful widow. But her ladyship was notorious for indulging in whims of which no one but herself could divine the reason; and in the present instance she was evidently laying herself out to be exceptionally polite and entertaining. After ten minutes' desultory chat on things in general, the name of Philip Lancaster happened to fall, quite by accident, from Lady Flanders's lips, and, after a moment's pause, she said:—

"By-the-by, my dear, I was quite upset yesterday. I don't know whether to believe it or not. I've taken such a fancy to the young gentleman, I should be sorry to see his domestic felicity destroyed. I have always disapproved of a man's marrying beneath him . . . the girl may be very attractive in some ways, but such persons lack training, and a proper realisation of their social

duties. Bless you, I don't expect women to be saints—that would put an end to society in six weeks—but there is everything in *savoir-faire*, tact, the way a thing is managed. Let a woman do anything but make a vulgar exhibition of herself. And that is just what this unfotunate creature seems to have done—that is, if the story is to be believed: and I have it on pretty good authority. What do you think about it?"

Perdita had been on her guard from the beginning of Lady Flanders's speech. She was startled (more perhaps than distressed) to find that her visitor knew anything about the matter; and anxious to discover why the old lady should suppose that she had any information. For there was one reason why Perdita had need to be cautious here; and that was, lest it should transpire that she herself had been at Vauxhall. That was the weak point in her position; but for that, she had nothing to apprehend. She was quite certain that no one among those whom she had recognised there had recognised her: as for Catnip—well as he knew her—she scarcely knew that such a person existed, she being, herein, at the disadvantage in which all persons of higher rank are liable to stand towards those in the lower. Lady Flanders therefore, (she argued), could have no knowledge of her own presence at Vauxhall;

and admitting that, it was impossible to suppose that her ladyship should, of her own motion, conjure up the imagination of so wildly improbable a thing. No; she must have been influenced by some other idea; and it was at this juncture that the Marquise bethought herself, with a feeling of relief, that it would be natural for Lady Flanders to infer that Philip himself had been her informant. In fact it was Philip who had first introduced the subject. Her apprehensions thus relieved, Perdita no longer saw in Lady Flanders anything more than an old scandalmonger greedy for the last new scrap of her favourite wares; and she consequently felt it necessary to observe no more than ordinary discretion.

"You have not yet told me," she remarked, "what it is you refer to."

"Dear me! sure enough!" exclaimed the other, innocently. "Well, I'm glad to see it has not been more talked about. Why, you must know, my dear, that our friend, Mrs. Lancaster, who seemed so precious straightforward and artless, has been guilty of the most outrageous rashness—not to call it by a worse name! She has been . . ." and here Lady Flanders lowered her voice and told the story which Perdita already knew, with much vivacity, and in a way to put

Marion's conduct in a most ungainly light. "'Tis impossible to be sorry for her," she continued; "such a brazen creature puts herself outside the pale of pity; but one can't help being sincerely concerned for that poor boy, Philip Lancaster. It will be a terrible blow for him; and knowing the friendly interest you have shown in him, I thought it likely he might have sought your advice on the subject."

"Since you have spoken on the subject, my dear Lady Flanders," said Perdita, gravely, "I may follow your example, though otherwise I should have kept silence. Mr. Lancaster has opened his mind to me, to some extent; and I counselled him to put the best construction possible on his wife's conduct, and rather to secure her safety in the future than inquire too curiously into the past. She is young and inexperienced, and will no doubt reform her behaviour when she realises its true character."

"Ay, ay, you little serpent!" said Lady Flanders, to herself, "'tis just as I thought, you and Master Philip have been feathering your own nest with what you've plucked from my poor little Marion's reputation. I'll catch you yet—see if I don't!" Aloud she added, "Indeed, my dear, your advice was most sensible, and you're a deal

more charitable than I should have been in your place. Well, and how did your advice affect him? I hope he won't lose his head and make a disturbance!"

"He does not yet know, and I hope never may know, the name of the gentleman implicated in the affair," said Perdita. "As you say, it could only make bad worse to have a public outbreak; and I don't think Philip will go so far as that until he has seen me again. . . ."

Perdita paused, doubting the prudence of this last sentence, which, in fact, had vastly delighted the cynical and Machiavellian old lady. The latter was convinced that the relations between Perdita and Philip would not bear inspection, and that they were making Marion's predicament a pretext for prosecuting their own intrigue. She was determined to bring their nefarious doings to light, and had already partly outlined to herself a plan of operations, having that end in view. For the present, she was satisfied at having attained the object of her visit, which was simply to ascertain that Perdita and Philip were on a confidential footing upon a matter so nearly affecting the latter's honour, and that their intimacy was such as it was expedient for them to disguise. The rest would be revealed in due time. Mean-

while she hastened to declare that it was a fortunate thing for Philip to have secured the friendly interest of a woman of the world like Perdita; and that she trusted he would show his appreciation of it.

"I was going to say," remarked Perdita, who had her wits about her, and was by no means prone to believe in the sincerity of her visitor's cordiality, "that the whole story, so far as I am aware, is mere hearsay, and may be untrue. It would not surprise me were it to turn out so. So that any premature allusion to it, as your ladyship yourself suggested, might do a great deal of harm."

"Ay, to be sure," returned Lady Flanders, admiring the cleverness of this stroke; and for a moment she hesitated whether or not to give her authorities. She decided not to do so; turned the conversation into a review of the Bendibow affair, and soon after took her leave, charmed with the prospect of finally getting the better of the only woman in London whom she acknowledged as her equal in subtlety and intrigue.

We will now return to Philip Lancaster. He came home late after his interview with Perdita, and, Marion having already gone to her room, he resolved to postpone whatever he might have to

say to her until the next day. Indeed, he needed time to turn the matter over in his mind. Before speaking to Perdita, he had not regarded it in a really serious light. All he knew was, that Marion had spent the greater part of a night away from home; that her mother had only accidentally discovered her absence; and that Marion had given no satisfactory account of where she had been. When he had asked her about it, she had merely laughed, in her strange, perverse way, had affected to treat it lightly, and had remarked that he would know by-and-by without her telling him. He had confined himself, at the time, to some moderate expression of displeasure; he was not prepared to believe in anything worse than an imprudent freak, especially while he was under the influence of Marion's presence. She had presently begun to speak of Bendibow's arrest, and had expressed a strong desire to know the details of any confession he might make; and she had suggested that Philip should take the packet and return it to Perdita without delay. He agreed to do this; and with that their conversation terminated. But when Philip was alone his reflections became more and more uncomfortable; Marion's refusal to explain her escapade seemed very strange; and her sudden anxiety to hear about

Bendibow's confession looked like a pretext for changing the subject. Even this errand to Perdita might be a device to get him out of the way. When, therefore, he and Perdita met he was in a fit mood to receive the intelligence she had ready for him; he learnt from her, for the first time, where it was that Marion had gone, and what she had been seen to do there; for although Perdita neither told him that she herself had been the witness whose testimony she cited, nor mentioned Moore's name, she made it sufficiently evident to her auditor that it was not any ordinary freak he had to deal with here, but a matter involving all that is of most vital importance to a husband. And yet, though his mind was persuaded, his heart was not so. Did he not know Marion? and was it credible that she could do such wrong? It was necessary, however, that his mind and his heart should be put in accord one way or the other; and he spent the greater part of the night in trying to summon up all his wits and energies for the interview on the morrow. The natural consequence was, that when the morrow came he was so nervous and discomposed as with difficulty to control even his voice. The interview, which took place in the breakfast-room, which Marion entered just as

Philip was ready to leave it, did not last long, though its results did.

"Well," said Marion, as she entered, "did Madame Desmoines accept the packet? And did you see what was in it?"

"She did not open it in my presence," he answered, "We found other things to talk about."

"Oh, no doubt," said Marion, laughingly.

"There was nothing amusing in it, as you seem to suppose," he continued, hardly controlling his indignation. "I am going to ask you a serious question, Marion, and you must answer it."

"Must?"

"Yes—must!"

"That depends . . . upon my own pleasure, Mr. Philip!" she returned, with a nervous smile.

"You have taken your pleasure too much into your own hands already. I must know where you were the other night, and with whom."

"La! is your curiosity awake again so early? Ask me some other time. I'm not ready to tell you just yet."

"No other time will do. I must tell you since you seem ignorant of it, that your reputation as an honest woman is at stake. Bah! don't try to escape me with subterfuges, Marion. I know

that you were at Vauxhall Gardens ; and that your companion was a man who——”

“He he . . . has anyone been so base as to tell——”

“Anyone !” thundered Philip, his eyes blazing. “Who ?”

Marion lifted her head high, but she trembled all over, and her face was white. She met Philip's fiery glance with a scornful look ; but beneath the scorn there were unfathomable depths of pain, humiliation, appeal. Philip saw only the scorn ; he was in no mood for insight. Thus the husband and wife confronted each other for several moments, while the air still seemed to echo with Philip's angry shout.

“Philip,” said Marion, at length, in a thin voice, which sustained itself with difficulty, “I have done you no wrong ; and I should have been willing, some time, to tell you all you ask. But until you go down on your knees at my feet, and crave my pardon, I will not speak to you again !”

“Then we have exchanged our last words together,” said he.

Marion bent her head as if in assent, and moved to one side, so that her husband might

leave the room. He paused at the door, and said :—

“I give you one more chance. Will you confess? I might forgive you, then; but if you compel me to bring home to your . . . what you have done, on any other evidence, by God, I never will forgive you!—Oh, Marion! will you?”

His voice faltered; tears of misery and entreaty were in his eyes. Marion made a half-step towards him: but, by another impulse, she drew back again, covering her eyes with one hand, while with the other she motioned him away. Neither would yield; and so they parted.

Philip went forth, not knowing whither he was going. His world was turned upside down, and his life looked like a desert. He walked along the streets with wide-open but unseeing eyes—or with eyes that saw only Marion, as she stood with her hand over her face, waving him away. Sometimes he thought it must have been a dream: but he could not awake. He went down to the river-bank, near Chelsea, and sat for several hours on a bench, looking at the muddy current as it swirled by. The sky was cloudy and the wind cold, but he did not seem aware of it. It was already late in the afternoon when he arose and returned towards

the north. But where should he go? Home? There was no such place.

For a couple of hours we leave Philip to himself, to meet with what adventures destiny may provide.

At six o'clock in the evening we come up with him again. He is hurrying along the street with a new light in his face—of anxiety, of suspense, of hope! Hope is unmistakably there—the dawn of a belief in the possibility of better things. The unfrequent lamps that dimly light the street intermittently reveal the expression of his haggard and eager features. Arrived at the door of his house, he paused for a moment, biting his lips and clenching his hands; then he ran up the steps and rang the bell. The door seemed never to be going to open, and in his impatience he rang again. It opened at last. He strode across the threshold.

"Mrs. Lancaster upstairs?"

"No, sir," said the servant. "She went out this afternoon in a carriage: not your carriage, sir. She left a note she said was to be given to you, sir. 'Tis there on the 'all table, sir."

A singular quietness came over Philip, as he opened the letter, and deliberately read its contents. He seemed to himself to have known that this was coming. He put the letter in his pocket.

"That's all right," he said to the servant. "I had forgotten . . . I shall probably not be back to-night." He waited an instant or two, looking down at the ground: then, without saying anything more, he descended the steps and walked away. The door closed behind him.

CHAPTER XV.

PERDITA had planned to attend the opera that evening, and afterwards she meant to look in at Lord Croftus' party, which had more or less of a political significance. Her carriage was waiting at the door, and she herself, in full raiment of festivity, was in the act of coming downstairs, with a soft siiken shawl thrown round her neck and shoulders to keep out the chill, when she heard the door-bell ring sharply, and some one was admitted to the hall below. Then the sound of a voice that was familiar to her came to her

ears. Hearing it, the Marquise paused on the upper landing, holding the folds of her shawl together with her left hand, and gazing expectantly downward.

"Philip, again!" she murmured. "Something must have happened. Well, let us see."

Philip mounted the stairs slowly and heavily, with his hand on the banisters, and his head bent down. Only when he reached the landing where Perdita stood did he look up. When she saw the expression on his face, she took him by the hand without a word, and led him up to the next floor, and into her boudoir. Some wine was sparkling in a decanter on the cabinet between the windows. She poured out a glass of this, and held it to his lips. He had been glancing round the room in an apprehensive but intent way, and then into her face, as if suspecting the presence of some one or of something which did not appear. After a few moments' pause he drank the wine, and put the glass down.

"If she is here, tell me at once," he said.

"No one is here but ourselves. Whom do you mean?"

"You know nothing about it?"

"No. What is it?"

"Have you seen my wife lately?"

"Lately? Three or four days ago—a week."

"Then . . . she's lost!"

"Marion—your wife? Why, Philip . . . lost!"

"I thought she might have come here. No, I didn't think it: I hoped—I couldn't believe all at once that she was gone. One tries to dodge such things as long as possible." He fetched a deep breath, and took off his hat, which, up to this moment, he had forgotten to remove. "I beg your pardon," he said vaguely, drawing his brows together as if to collect his wits; "Thank you. You're going out. I won't detain you."

"Sit down, Philip," said the Marquise, guiding him to a chair as if he had been a child, or an infirm person. "I am not going out—I am going to stay here with you. See! I am dressed to receive you," she added, throwing off her wrap and smiling. "Now, Philip, we are friends, you know, and you have confidence in me. Let me help you. At any rate, tell me!"

"I am ashamed to tell it," said he, heavily. "I have been to blame: but I never thought of this. It doesn't seem possible in her!"

"Has your wife left you—has she run away?" asked Perdita, putting into words, with her accustomed strength of nerve, what Philip shrank from formulating even in his thought. He did

not reply, save by an assenting silence, and she presently went on: "Are you sure there is no mistake? She can't have been gone long; she may come back."

"She will never come back: she left a letter, to say she thought it best we should not meet again, after . . . some words we had this morning. But that is a pretext! I had a right to ask her to explain. She must have made up her mind before; and when she found I knew what—what you told me——"

"Did you tell her it was I?"

"No: she thought it was the fellow himself who had spoken—she betrayed herself in thinking he had betrayed her. Oh, what a miserable, pitiable thing! 'Tis as if she were another woman—she seemed so noble and so pure! And even Lady Flanders had just been telling me that it was all nonsense—my imagination."

"Lady Flanders?"

"I met her in the street an hour ago. She said my suspicions were an outrage on the truest and purest woman alive; but that I deserved to suffer the misfortune I imagined, and that if she were Marion, she would give me my deserts. And when I told her what I knew, she laughed, and said she knew all that and much more, and

that Marion was as innocent as an angel in spite of it. I didn't know what to think; but I came home, ready to kneel down and ask her pardon, if it were true. But she had taken her opportunity, and gone."

This story was a surprise for Perdita, and she could not understand it. It seemed entirely improbable that Lady Flanders could have been sincere in what she had said; but, then, what could have been her object in saying it? Was she secretly aiding Moore in his schemes? That was conceivable, and her ladyship was quite wicked enough: and yet it was not a characteristic kind of wickedness in her. Moreover, what help would it give the fugitive couple to make Philip believe for a few minutes that his wife was innocent? On the other hand, however, what interest could she have had in making a woman appear innocent of whose guilt she was persuaded? It was perplexing either way, and caused Perdita some uneasiness: she regretted having spoken to the old plotter even so frankly as she had done. But she would get to the bottom of that matter later: Philip engaged her attention now. The crisis of his trouble had come on much sooner than she expected, and she was inclined to share (though with a different feeling) his amazement at his wife's action. Perdita

felt that she had undervalued Marion's audacity and resolution, not to speak of her unscrupulousness. She had been startled to see her at Vauxhall; but this sudden culmination of the intrigue showed a spirit stronger and more thoroughgoing than that of the ordinary intriguer.

"And to think of her doing it for a dapper little tomtit like Tom Moore!" said the Marquise to herself. "Well! 't isn't he I would have done it for!" Here she glanced at Philip, who sat relaxed and nerveless, his chin resting upon his broad chest, his great eyes, haggard and sad, gazing out beneath the dark level of his brows; his noble figure, revealed beneath the close-buttoned coat and small-clothes, sunk in a posture of unconscious grace; his hessians stained with the mire of the weary miles he had traversed: here was a man to whom, indeed, a woman might yield her heart, and for whose sake she might imperil her renown. But what woman in her senses—especially when they were senses so keen as Marion's appeared to be would abandon such a man as this for . . . ? It roused the Marquise's indignation.

"She has gone, then, Philip: let her go!" she said, fixing upon him her sparkling eyes. "I can forgive a woman for anything but being a fool! I am a woman, and I know—or can imagine—

what it is to love. But she has thrown herself away for nothing. What you loved was something that never was in her, though you fancied otherwise. You can forget her: and you will! What is she to you?"

"I won't forget her yet!" Philip said, lifting his face with a grim look. "I'll find her first," he continued, suddenly rising to his feet, and tossing back his black tangled hair, "and the man who is with her! I need occupation, and that will suit me."

"I believe in revenge as much as anybody," observed the beautiful Marquise, tapping her white fingers on the arm of her chair; "but what you are thinking of is vulgar. Any poor forsaken husband can run after his wife, and risk losing his life as well as her. There are finer things to do than that, Philip. Why should you pay them the compliment of hunting them down? Let them punish each other: they'll do it soon enough, and more cruelly than you would!"

"I want the fellow's blood," said Philip, savagely. "I won't fight him—I'll kill him. I don't want finer kinds of revenge: they wouldn't satisfy what I feel here!" As he spoke he put his clenched hand over his heart.

"And after the killing—what? Suicide, to

prevent hanging. It mustn't be, Philip. Feel that you are well rid of her; and let her know it!"

He shook his head. "How could that be done?"

Perdita waited until his eyes encountered hers. It would be no slight feat to make a man in Philip's condition forget his disgrace and wretchedness by dint of the sheer potency of her personal charm. But Perdita's spirit was equal to the attempt, and she was conscious that she had never been better equipped for success. And if she did succeed so far, she might safely leave the rest to him. It was a crisis for herself as well as for him. The craving for adventure, the defiance of laws, the passion of the heart, which she had been all her life approaching, might be realised now: if not now, then not at all. Perdita had a powerful heart, full of courage for any emergency, and with capacity for trenchant emotion both of love and hate. She had been lonely and self-poised from her girlhood; she had fenced herself with the armour of an alert and penetrating mind, and had made good her defence; but, to a woman, victories like these are little better than defeat. She had fought to gain that which she would rather lose. She longed to yield; to give up her sword and shield, and taste the sweetness of sub-

mission. The laws of God and man were against her, but she perceived that it was only by disregarding these laws that she could gain her desire; and she had never been taught to love the one or to respect the other. She had wished to conquer Philip: to bring him to her feet, as she had brought other men, and then to draw back, herself uncompromised and unhurt. But now she found that no such cold triumph would content her. She was ready to take the further step that separates the thousand prudent coquettes of the social world from the few who are daring enough to surrender. All would be lost but love: but was not that worth all?

These thoughts were stirring in the depths of the look which she bent upon Philip; and the fire of them searched through the thick clouds of despondency and wrath that brooded over his mind. An answering fire began to kindle in his own eyes. For when the fierce emotions of the soul have been aroused, their sinister heat permeates the blood, and makes the impulses plastic; so that adultery goes hand-in-hand with murder.

"There is more than one woman in the world, *mon ami*," said Perdita. "What you have lost by one, you might perhaps more than regain by another."

"Ah, Perdita!" muttered Philip, in an inward tone. He drew two or three deep breaths, and sat down beside her. "Was this destined to be the end of the story?" he continued. "Why did we not know it long ago? Shall we revenge each other on those who have injured us?" He took her hand, which responded to the pressure he gave it. "So this is what was destined!" he repeated, "and I was a fool to leave you after all!"

"We were neither of us ready then, perhaps," she said, in the same low tone in which he had spoken. Speech came slowly to both of them, there was so much to say. "You gave me a scar which I vowed to requite you for," she added, with a smile.

"The seal of blood upon our union," he responded, smiling also. "I have bled too. How well I remember all that. It was symbolic. You challenged me to it, and handed me the swords, to make my choice. In the second pass my foot slipped, and my point touched your breast. You seemed not to try to parry."

"If it had passed through my heart, I shouldn't have minded then."

"Were you so unhappy?"

"I was weary. But new life came to me with that wound. You were very tender . . . and very

timid!" she said, laughing. "Was I the first woman whose heart you had endangered?"

"Well, I had my scruples. Your husband was my friend. I'm not sorry that I did so now. I should have felt remorse. But that is all past. No remorse any more! No one can blame us, Perdita. When did you begin to . . . think of me?"

"I had never asked my heart many questions, nor let myself listen when it tried to speak. Perhaps I never cared for you until this moment. But I wanted you to care for me from the first. It seems so strange, Philip, to be talking to you without a disguise. I don't believe I have ever done that to any one. I wonder how soon I shall get used to it!"

"You will forget that it was strange soon."

"And shall we begin to get tired of each other then?"

"God forbid that should ever happen!" exclaimed Philip, with a sombre look.

"Yes; one cannot expect to succeed in this sort of experiment more than once," returned Perdita, with a smile. "We should have to try another fencing match then, and you would have to push your rapier a little further." After a pause

she continued, "Were you really in love with your wife, Philip?"

"We must not speak about that."

"There must be no closed subjects between us, sir!" she said, lifting her finger playfully. "We won't belong to society any more, remember; have nothing but each other to comfort ourselves with. There is no intimacy like this intimacy, Philip. A husband and wife represent the world; but we—what do we represent?"

"Then let us make a new beginning here, and build a wall between us and the past. We are no longer what we have been: why should we recall the deeds and thoughts of persons who were not what we are?"

"We have only one thing to be afraid of," said the Marquise, looking at him thoughtfully, "and that is fear! Unless you can take your courage in your hands, *mon ami*, the time will come when you will need it, and find it wanting. It is best to think of these things while there is yet time. If you fear Marion, or your memories of her, do not come near me! I cannot help you there. In all else I would be as true as steel to you. But you must be true to me. The worldly honour that we abandon must make our honour towards each other doubly strong."

Again Philip rose suddenly to his feet: but instead of standing in one place he began to pace up and down the room. Perdita, after watching him keenly for a few moments, leaned back in her chair and remained quite without movement, save that the changing glitter of the necklace on her bosom showed that she breathed. Almost any other woman would have betrayed signs of nervousness or agitation under such circumstances; but there was in Perdita, notwithstanding her subtlety and superficial fickleness, a certain strong elemental simplicity of character, that enabled her, after entering upon a given course, to pursue it with as much steadiness and singleness of purpose as if no other course were possible. She was one of those who can sleep soundly on the eve of execution, or play their last stake and lose it with a smile. And now, when, as she divined from Philip's manner, and the changing expressions that passed across his face, all was once more in doubt between them, and the issue beyond prophecy, it was not only possible but natural for her to sit composed and silent, and await what must be to her the final good or evil of the future. She knew that there were ways in which she might influence Philip; but with that strange feminine pride that never avouches itself more strongly than at the

moment when all pride seems to have been surrendered, she would not avail herself of them. Had she tried to move him at all, it would have been on the other side. At last he stopped in his walk, and halted before her. She looked up at him with a smile.

"Well, monsieur, have you thought it all out? Have you realised the folly of it? Sit down here and tell me your opinion."

"I am going to play the most ungainly part that can fall to a man," he said, in a husky and obstructed voice, which he did not attempt to make smooth. "Let us part, Perdita. The only thing that gives me resolution to say this is, that I find it hard to say. But I know myself too well! I am small and incomplete of nature: hitherto I have deluded myself, and perhaps others, by a play of intellect which drew attention from my real feebleness and narrowness, and made me seem to be as broad and as deep as the reach of my thoughts and imagination. It is all delusion: I can chatter and contrive, but what I do and feel is petty and cold. There have been moments when I fancied I had overcome that torpid chill of the heart, and should be single, at last, in thought and feeling; but the chill has always come back, and the horizon been blotted out again by the shadow

of my own carcase. Even now it is of myself that I am talking, instead of about you!"

"That is why you interest me, my friend."

"Yes; and I might as well stop here. I am not going to hang such a lump of emptiness as myself round your neck. Even your overflow of life would not suffice long to vivify me. A man whose wife has been forced to desert him six months after marriage—a man who, merely by being himself could change an innocent and high-spirited girl into a miserable outcast—such a fellow as that has neither the power nor the right to claim the love of a woman like you. Perdita, I am not fit even to commit a genuine sin! May God help me to the decency of keeping henceforth to myself! What would be, at least, generosity and courage in you, would be selfish and dastardly in me. It amazes me that I can feel even the shame and self-contempt that I am trying to give utterance to. But probably I shall have forgotten that too by to-morrow!"

"All that is very extravagant and impolite," said Perdita, pleasantly. "You should know better than to abuse a gentleman whom I esteem, and . . . who cannot defend himself! Seriously, Philip, if I am angry with you, it is because you are quite right. I will not compliment you on your virtue,

because you don't seem to think of that so much as to be afraid of becoming a burden on my hands. No—I perceive, underneath your disguise, a courteous desire to save me from the consequences of my own rashness. It is the act of a true gentleman and . . . I shall never forgive it! I must, like you, have some occupation, and since you will not let me love you, you shall give employment to my hate. It will be just as amusing, and a great deal more *comme il faut*! And then, some day—who knows?—your lost Marion may turn up again, neither better nor worse than other men's wives, and with her curiosity as to the world gratified. And then you will be happier than ever. Will you drink another glass of wine?"

"Yes!" said Philip, pouring it out, and taking the glass in his hand. "I drink to your new occupation, Perdita. May it bring you satisfaction; and may you long enjoy it!"

"Stay!" exclaimed she: "let me drink too. But my toast shall be different. May the day on which I forgive you be the last day I live!"

They drank, and set down their glasses; and exchanged a final look. Was it hate that he saw in her eyes, or love? Often afterwards that question recurred to Philip's mind, and never found a certain answer. But he always remembered

Perdita as she stood there, erect and bright, with a smile on her beautiful face, and her red lips wet with the red wine.

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR FRANCIS BENDIBOW, the last of his race, and once held to be the greatest and most successful banker in England, was meanwhile lying on a bed in a small room, in a house not his own, and with no traces of luxury about him. The bed, indeed, was an easy bed enough, though it was not made of mahogany, nor draped with damask curtains: and the room was by no means a dungeon, though the furniture and fittings were of the plainest and most economical description, and Sir Francis would not have been at liberty to open the door and go out, had he wished to do so. It is not probable, however, that he wished to do anything of the kind: nor, had he been as free as the sparrow that was twittering on the eaves outside the narrow window, could he have found strength to rise from his bed and walk across the room. His physical resources were at an end: and the physician who had felt his pulse

that morning had admitted (in response to the urgent demand of the baronet) that the chances were against his surviving many hours longer. Sentence of death, come it how it may, generally produces a notable impression on the recipient. Sir Francis said nothing: he fixed his eyes curiously upon the doctor's face for a few moments; then let his gaze wander slowly round the room, taking note of every object in it. Finally he settled himself comfortably in the bed, and appeared to give himself up to his meditations, in the midst of which the doctor left him, feeling some surprise at the baronet's sang-froid and equanimity. "Must have a tolerably clear conscience, after all," he remarked to Fillmore, outside the door. "Dare say others were more to blame for the smash than he. Seems always to have been unlucky in his friends."

Sir Francis, in fact, appeared rather cheerful than otherwise. The symptoms of harassment, suspense, and irritation which had beset him for several months past, were no longer visible. He lay there as one who composedly awaits some agreeable event, and, meanwhile, occupies himself with passing in review before his mind the incidents of a pleasant and successful career. After an hour or so of this, however, he signed

to Fillmore to approach the bedside, and spoke to him earnestly, though in a low tone, for several moments. After a little discussion, the lawyer left the room. He did not return for five or six hours, during which time Sir Francis lay quite alone, save for an occasional momentary visit from the attendant on duty. At last there was another step in the passage: the door opened and Fillmore came in.

"She has come," he said, walking up to the bed, and looking keenly down at the other. "Are you still of the same mind?"

The baronet nodded, and said: "Lose no time."

Fillmore went back to the door, and immediately returned with Marion Lancaster on his arm. He led her to the bedside, and the baronet greeted her with a movement of the hand and arm, and a slight bend of the head, which, feeble though they were, somehow recalled the grand obeisances that Sir Francis Bendibow was wont to make in the days of his prosperity and renown.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, indicating the chair at his side. "Very kind of you to come. You look fatigued."

So indeed she did, with a fatigue that was

more than bodily. "I am well enough," she said, looking at him gravely; and she sat down.

"Fillmore," said the baronet, "will you remain outside a bit? Mrs. Lancaster and I are going to have a little private chat together."

When the lawyer had withdrawn, Sir Francis altered his position so as to face Marion more fully, and said, "I had an odd impression the other day. I was at a place—Vauxhall, in fact—on business; and something happened there that upset me. I was senseless for a while, or nearly so: but I had an impression that I saw your face, and heard your voice. And afterwards, for a time, I fancied I heard and saw you again at intervals. It was in a room at an inn, somewhere, at last. That must have been all a fancy of mine—eh?"

"No, I was with you," Marion replied. "I saw when you fell: and I got a carriage and took you to an inn. I should have taken you to your own house: but a gentleman whom I happened to meet, and who assisted me, seemed to think it best not to do that."

"Quite right of him, whoever he was," said the baronet: "though, as things are to-day, it doesn't make much difference, either. So 'twas

really you? The gentleman was your husband, of course?"

"No: my husband knew nothing of my going there. I went there to meet you, Sir, Francis."

The baronet looked surprised.

"I never thought to have the opportunity to tell you this," Marion continued. "I wanted to ask you something, which nobody but you could tell me. I heard you were living at Twickenham, but, when I went there, they told me you would see no one. But, as I was going away, one of your servants said that you would be, at a certain hour, at Vauxhall."

"Gatnip, for a thousand pounds!" interjected the dying man, with some animation.

"I think that was his name," said Marion. "My husband happened to be away from home that night, so I made up my mind to go. But for a long time I could not find you anywhere. At last, just as I was going away, there was a disturbance in the crowd, and I saw you. But you were not able to speak then."

"Upon my soul!" said the baronet, with a feeble grimace, "I should have felt honoured, madame, had I been aware . . . Well, I'm rather

far gone for gallantry now. But what could I have told you, eh?"

"I wanted to know about Mr. Grant—whether he were really your friend Grantley."

"Ay? What did you want to know that for?"

"Because he had bequeathed some money to his nearest of kin. If he were Mr. Grantley, the money would have come to my husband: but not so if he were some one else. And no one could tell me but you."

"Ha! Well, twenty thousand pounds is worth running some risk for," said the baronet; "and 'twas some risk to run, begad, going alone to Vauxhall at midnight, my dear! But who withholds the bequest from you? And why didn't you send your husband or your lawyer to make the inquiry?"

Sir Francis seemed not to understand this explanation: it was hardly to be expected he should do so; but, with the indifference to minor inconsistencies natural to his condition, he passed it over, and, after a short pause, he said, reverting to his former idea, "The legacy is safe enough, my dear. Grant was Grantley—that is all the matter with him. If he'd been anyone else, I'd not be lying here to-day. Your husband may

keep his twenty thousand pounds, and much good may it do him ! There's not much worth having in this world, but money's the best worth having of what there is." He stopped for a few moments. "It just happens," he continued, "that 'twas about this same Grantley I wanted to speak to you. 'Tis not worth while, perhaps ; but when a man's going to die, a secret is of no good to him—all the more if it's a secret that has been bothering him all his life. I've been the slave of more secrets than one, and they've never shown me any mercy : but 'tis my turn now ; for I can reveal 'em, and they can do me no harm ! I can laugh at 'em, begad ! and not be a penny the worse for it. But for all that, my dear, I wouldn't have told 'em to anyone but you. There's something about you—always was—different from any other creature I ever met. Your husband's a lucky fellow ; and if he's not the happiest fellow, and the best, that ever breathed, then stifle me if he isn't a fool and a villain !"

"You misjudge me and him," said Marion speaking beneath her set teeth. "I am ready to hear about Mr. Grant, Sir Francis." But at this point her self-command gave way, and she burst into a passion of tears—the first she had shed since her quarrel with Philip the morning before.

The baronet, who could not suppose that anything he had said had given occasion for this outbreak, allowed himself the flattery of believing that it was compassion for his own state that moved her—a delusion that did neither of them any harm; and possibly it was not so entirely a delusion that some such sentiment may not have added itself to Marion's deeper causes of unhappiness. At all events, by the time she had regained control of herself, the feeling between the two had become gentler and more sympathetic.

"'Tis somewhat late in the day to find a friend who can be sorry for me," remarked the baronet ruefully: "and there have been times when I might have looked for it more than I do now. Grantley and I were friends; but affairs turned out so, that one or other of us had to give up everything: and he was the one to do it. It looks pretty bad, in one way; but the amount of it was that I cared more for myself than I did for him; and there's not many men who might not confess to as much as that. Besides, I had more to lose than he had: I was the head of the house, and the name and the existence of the business would go with me. But 'twas a damned gentlemanly thing of him to do what he did, and I'm free to confess I wouldn't have done it in his

place. 'Tis bad enough to suffer for your own fault, but it must be a hard business to go down for the fault of another man—though that's what often happens in this world, whether we want it or not. You see, my dear, there was always a bit of a gambler in me, and I used to have wonderful luck. When I was quite a young fellow, I used to sit up night after night at the clubs, and it struck me that since where one fortune was made and kept, ten to a score were lost, it would be a good plan to arrange matters so that what so many lost, one should win—and I that one. One thing led to another, and the end of it was that I set up a place called Rackett's—though only two or three men knew that I had anything to do with it; and all I need say about it now is, that more money came to us by that quiet little place than by the bank itself: ay, a good deal more, begad!

“A hundred times I might have sold out for enough to buy half Old Jewry with: but I liked the fun of the thing, and there seemed no chance of losing. We did lose at last, though, and by wholesale, too. There was no accounting for it; 'twas more like a special miracle than anything I ever knew of. I knew the luck must change some time, so I kept putting in to fill up the hole, until I put in all of my own that I had in the

world. Then I took from the bank: hadn't any business to do it, of course; but it was sure to come all right in the end, if nobody found it out. That was the weak point: somebody did find it out; and Grantley was the man. He came straight to me, and asked me what I was about. I tried to stop him off; but it wouldn't do. He forced me to own up: and then the question came, What was to happen next? I was a ruined man, and the bank was as good as gone, if the truth came out. Grantley was a careful fellow, and he had saved a vast deal of money; and I asked him to help me out of the scrape. We looked into the thing—he cared a great deal for me in those days, and as much, maybe, for the credit of the bank—and found that it would take all he'd got to make good only what was gone from the bank, not to speak of the rest of it; and to make it worse, there was no way of putting the money back without betraying that it had been taken out irregularly.

“But at last he got an idea, and I give him credit for it. ‘It must become known, Frank,’ he said to me, ‘that the bank has been robbed by somebody. You are the bank, and it stands or falls with you. It won't make so much difference about me. You may have what I've got, and

I'll leave the country. Let 'em think I took it, and that you replaced it. I can make my own way somewhere else, under another name; and the concern will be saved. Take care of my wife and child: it won't do to take them with me, but maybe, I can send for them after a bit. And do you let gambling alone for the future.'

"It was a good offer, and I took it, as most men would have done in my place. I'm not sure, now, but I might as well have let it alone. At any rate, off he went, and that was the last I heard from him for twenty years, except when I sent him word, a little while after, that his wife had died. He wrote back asking me to educate the child, and do the best I could for her; where he was, was no place for her. Meanwhile, I was contriving to keep along, but no more; we never had any luck after he left. That confounded Rackett's kept draining me: I had promised him; but the other men had a hold on me, by threatening to expose me if I didn't let 'em have what they wanted; and they wanted more than I could find of my own to give 'em. So, what with one thing and another, when he came back under his assumed name last year, he found things pretty nearly in as bad a way as when he went off.

"I may have been mistaken," continued the

baronet, speaking in a more uncertain tone ; “but I had been worried so much, and had so much underhand fighting to do, that I thought Grantley meant me no good. He had in his possession some papers—letters that had passed between us, and other things—that enabled him, if he chose, to turn me out of house and home and into gaol at a day’s notice. I might have stood it for myself; but there was my boy Tom ; and I felt that I could sooner kill Grantley than let Tom know I hadn’t been an honest man. There was Perdita, too; he would be sure to make himself known to his own daughter if to nobody else ; and he wouldn’t be likely to do that without letting her know that he was not the man who robbed the bank. And if Perdita knew it, all London would know it, for she never was a friend of mine, and would jump at a chance to ruin me.”

“You are wrong,” said Marion, who was sitting with her hands tightly clasped in her lap, and her eyes fixed with a sad sternness upon the narrator ; “Madame Desmoines has had the papers within her reach for six months, and has never opened them until, perhaps, yesterday.”

“Well, right or wrong makes no difference now. I tried to make Grantley give me back the papers by fair means, and when he refused

I was more than ever persuaded he meant mischief; so I resolved to get them in spite of him. I found he always carried them about with him; and then I thought there was no way for it but to hire a footpad to rob him. But it was too risky a job to trust to anyone . . .”

Marion rose, and stood with one trembling hand grasping the back of her chair. She could bear it no longer.

“Don’t tell me any more!” she exclaimed, in a low, almost threatening voice. “I know the rest. You did it yourself, Sir Francis. You killed him—you murdered him in the dark; and he was the noblest, sweetest, most generous of men, and never harmed a human being! Can nothing make you feel that you have been wicked? And you tried to kill him once before—yes! that night of the thunderstorm. A man like you has no right to die! You ought to live for ever, and have no rest!”

“Well, my dear,” said the baronet, not seeming to feel much emotion, “Providence is more merciful than you are, though not so just, I dare say; it doesn’t give a man earthly immortality on account of his sins. You see I can’t feel as shocked at myself as you do; I’ve known

myself so long, I've got used to it. And if you would think over my crimes, quietly, for the next twenty years or so, maybe you'd not be so anxious to have me damned. We are what we are, and some of us have bad luck into the bargain. That's all! I'm glad you found me out, however you did it; for I don't believe I should have had the pluck to confess I killed him, when it came to the point. It was a dirty piece of business; and if it hadn't been for . . . one thing, I was just as likely to put the bullet into my own heart as his. But," continued the dying man, by a great effort raising himself in his bed, and lifting his arms, while the blood rushed to his face, making it dark and lurid—"but when I knew that in taking his life I had been led on to take the life of my own darling boy—that I loved a thousand times more than I hated anybody else—by the living God, I could have murdered Grantley over again, out of revenge!"

These are the last words known to have been uttered by Sir Francis Bendibow. He became unconscious soon after, and died the same afternoon. They were terrible words; and yet, when Marion recalled them long afterwards, it seemed to her that there might be, perhaps, something

in them indicative of a moral state less abjectly depraved than was suggested by his previous half-complacent apathy.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE morning after Bendibow's death Merton Fillmore sent word to the Marquise Desmoines that he would call upon her that evening, if she found it convenient to receive him. She returned answer that she would expect him.

Ever since her parting with Philip Lancaster, the Marquise had kept herself secluded. After such an experience, even she needed time to draw her breath and look about her. It was more like defeat than anything else that had ever happened to her. It was defeat in fact, if not altogether in form. She had, whether consciously or unconsciously, shaped all her course and purpose to the end of being loved by Philip; and he did not love her. Nothing could disguise that truth; and it was additionally embittered by the discovery, almost unexpected to herself, that she not only preferred him to other men, but that she loved him, and that he was the only man she

ever had loved. She had allowed him to perceive this, and the perception had failed to kindle in him a response. No doubt she had assumed on the instant the semblance of cool indifference; she had divined her failure almost before she had made it; she had listened to his reply with a smile, and had dismissed him with defiance; but, after all, she knew in her inmost heart that she had been worsted; and whether Philip were as intimately conscious of it, or were conscious of it at all, made little difference. She had offered him more than any woman can offer with impunity, and he had professed himself unable to accept it.

After he left her she was for a time supported by the ardour of defiant anger, which made her feel as if she had never been conquered—had scarcely begun to fight, indeed—and had illimitable reserves of strength still to draw upon. But when this mood had flamed itself out, she began to realise how little her strength and resources could avail her. She had no longer any object to contend for. She had lost the day, and, no matter what her vigour and courage might be, the day in which she might redeem herself would never dawn. Philip was, to all intents and purposes, exanimate; and she might as hopefully strive, by dint of her beauty

and brilliance, to restore life to a corpse from the hospital as to stimulate Philip to feel even so much emotion towards her as would make him care whether she loved him or hated him. The shock of Marion's loss, and the self-revelation it had wrought in him, had put him above or below the reach of other feelings. He had collapsed; and it was this collapse which had rendered him indomitable even by the Marquise Desmoines.

What was left to her? The injury was too deep not to demand requital. But how could she avenge herself on Philip? What could she make him suffer that he was not already suffering? His life was broken up; he had lost his wife and his place in the world—for she knew Philip well enough to be aware that it would be a long while (if ever) before a man of his organisation would be able to renew his relations with society. Surely hatred itself could not pursue him further! There was nothing to be done.

And yet to do nothing was intolerable to Perdita; she could have borne anything else better. Inaction gnawed her heart and made her existence bitter. But what could she do? Should she kill him? No: life could hardly be so dear to him as to make that worth while. Should she kill herself? That, indeed, was as likely as anything else to

put an end to her unrest; but should she allow Philip to imagine that she had died for love of him? She laughed, and shook her head. It was while she was in this mood that Fillmore's letter came, mentioning Bendibow's death. The news interested her, for she fancied it might in some way bear upon the subject that possessed her thoughts. She awaited his arrival with impatience.

He came punctually, as usual; but his face and demeanour, as he entered the room, were singularly reserved and sombre. The Marquise, if she noticed this at all (and it would be hard to say what a woman like her does not notice), laid it to the account of the death-scene at which he had been present. As for herself, she felt no regret, and was not in the vein to express what she did not feel. She greeted the lawyer coolly and briefly, and went at once to the subject.

"Sir Francis has died in good time and with good taste. I had not given him credit for so much consideration."

"Yes, madame," replied Fillmore, bowing. "He has solved many difficulties. Possibly it was only the struggle against misfortune that kept him in life so long. The death of his son was his death-blow. His ruin was a relief to him."

"Fortune and misfortune are in our feeling,

not in our circumstances: that is an old story," observed Perdita. "Well, did he die repentant?"

"He was unconscious for several hours before his death, and I was not present when his last words were spoken."

"'Tis a pity he should have been alone. He might have said something worth hearing. A good many secrets have died with him."

"He was not alone, madame."

"Who was with him?"

"Mrs. Lancaster."

Perdita was dumb for a moment. "Did you say Mrs. Philip Lancaster?" she then asked, bending forward curiously.

Fillmore bowed in assent.

"I did not know she was in London," said the Marquise, after another short pause. "Her husband certainly was not aware. . . . How did this happen?"

"It was the baronet's wish," replied Fillmore. "Her name had been often mentioned by him since his catastrophe: her kind behaviour to him at Vauxhall——"

"What had she to do with him at Vauxhall?" interrupted Perdita, making herself erect in her chair.

"I am not acquainted with the details of the

matter," said Fillmore, "but it seems that she wished to consult him on a subject of importance, and, owing to the mysterious habits he had adopted of late, she was obliged to seek him at Vauxhall. He was taken with a fit—indeed, I believe it was the disturbance which this occasioned that first discovered him to her——"

"This is a strange story!" Perdita broke out. "I had heard that Mrs. Lancaster was at Vauxhall, but the name of the gentleman with her was not Francis Bendibow."

"You yourself saw her there, did you not?" inquired Fillmore, with a steady look.

"Are you a detective as well as a solicitor, Mr. Fillmore?" demanded the Marquise, smiling ironically; "I did see her there, on the arm of Mr. Tom Moore."

"I do but repeat what is known and spoken of by others," said Fillmore: "but it seems to be generally conceded that her meeting with Moore was accidental,—he assisted her in getting a carriage to take the baronet away. She was guilty of great imprudence, but, it seems, in a cause which she thought urgent enough to justify it. As I was saying, Sir Francis never lost the recollection of her kindness, and towards the last he expressed a strong desire to speak with her. I went to her

house in search of her, but was informed that she had been absent since the preceding day, and it was not known where she was."

"We must admit her conduct to be singular," remarked Perdita with a slight laugh. "No doubt, as you say, it was justifiable! Where did you find her?"

"Quite accidentally I met Lady Flanders, and, in the course of conversation, was informed by her ladyship that Mrs. Lancaster was at her house."

"Ah! Lady Flanders . . . But—well, go on!"

"Lady Flanders said," continued Fillmore, fixing his eyes in a marked way on Perdita, "that Mrs. Lancaster had felt herself grossly injured by . . . a person from whom she had every right to expect different treatment, and that in her distress and defencelessness, she had accepted Lady Flanders's proposal to make her ladyship's house her home for a few days."

"Really, Mr. Fillmore, a less charitable man than you might say that Lady Flanders had assisted Mrs. Lancaster to run away from her husband."

"Supposing Mrs. Lancaster to have had that intention," replied Fillmore coldly; "the general

opinion seems to be that her husband had spared her the necessity."

"How do you wish me to understand that?"

"That Philip Lancaster had planned an elopement on his own account."

"Positively you amuse me!" exclaimed Perdita, gazing at him intently. "Are you going to add the inspiration of a prophet to your two other professions? Tell me, with whom has Mr. Philip Lancaster planned to elope?"

"If you need to be told that," replied Fillmore, after a considerable pause, "there is nothing to tell."

The Marquise smiled. "Ah, Mr. Fillmore," said she, "you are not so clever a man as I thought! Mr. Lancaster came to me two nights ago; he was very tired and hungry, poor fellow; he had been hunting his wife over London, and seemed to think she might have taken refuge with me. I consoled him as well as I could, and sent him away. I have not seen or heard of him since then. Unfortunately, I was not in a position to give him the comforting information I have just heard from you. I am surprised that Lady Flanders, who seems to be such a friend of homeless wanderers, had not given him his wife's new address.

He told me that he had spoken with her ladyship that very afternoon."

"I know nothing about that," said Fillmore, whose sombre aspect had lightened somewhat during this speech, "but I found Mrs. Lancaster at Lady Flanders's house; she went with me to see Bendibow, and afterwards I accompanied her back to Lady Flanders. She seemed to be in a very low and anxious frame of mind, and there can be no doubt that she has been with Lady Flanders ever since she left her own house. As to the suggestion about Mr. Moore, I have the honour of that gentleman's acquaintance, and I could easily convince Mr. Philip Lancaster that he has no cause for misgiving on that score."

"The fact still remains that Mr. Lancaster did not know where his wife was. However, we can let that pass. Has it occurred to you, sir, that you owe me an apology?"

"I cannot find words in which to apologise for so great a wrong," said Fillmore, in a husky voice. "I cannot express, either, the joy I feel that it was a wrong. Oh, madame . . . Perdita! how can I think about you or judge you dispassionately! You cannot punish me so much as the anguish I have endured has already punished me! I thought I could not bear not to have you

love me; but now, that seems a delight in comparison with the misery of thinking that you had given yourself to him."

"Well, there seems to have been a contagion of error," said Perdita, with a queer smile. "Now that so much has been corrected, perhaps you may even come to your senses with regard to me! You are certainly a persistent man: 'tis a pity I am not a yielding woman."

"I can never give you up!" Fillmore said again.

"What! had you not given me up an hour ago?"

"No: less than ever. I would have followed you—anywhere!"

"It would have been in vain," said Perdita, shaking her head. "I have too much regard for you to let you pick me out of the mud, Mr. Fillmore: and too little regard for myself to submit to be saved on those terms. When I am driven to extremity, there is another bridegroom who is waiting for me even more patiently than you are, and who, unlike you, is certain to have me at last."

"Do not smile so, and talk of death," exclaimed Fillmore passionately. "There is more

life in the thought of you than in the flesh and blood of any other woman!"

"You are welcome to the thought of me, if you will forego the rest!" retured Perdita with a sigh. "But really, sir, that is a finer compliment than I should have expected to hear from a man so reserved as you. No—let us speak of something else. If all that you tell me be true, we may expect a reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster. It will only be a question of time."

Fillmore moved his head, but said nothing.

"You have no sentiment," pursued the Marquise laughingly. "It will be an affecting scene, if you think of it! Lovers' reconciliations are worth the quarrel it costs to have them. Our friend Philip will be happier than ever, and he will give us a beautiful poem inspired by his new experience; something that will make 'Iduna' seem crude and cold! There will be no drawback to his contentment!"

Something ironical in Perdita's tone struck Fillmore's ear, but he did not understand it, and remained silent.

"Too much happiness is dangerous," she went on: "it would be the part of friendship to abate a little of it. What do you think?"

"I am no friend of Mr. Lancaster's," said Fillmore shortly.

"You are very dull, sir!" exclaimed the Marquise, giving him a sparkling glance. "If you are no friend of his, think how much reason I have to be his friend! When he was a youth, whom no one knew, he formed the acquaintance of the Marquis, and came to our house, and read me his first little poems, which I praised, and encouraged him to write more, so that his first book, the 'Sunshine of Revolt,' was my godchild, and at that time I was its only reader. I saw that he had intellect, but his nature was timid, suspicious, self-conscious, and cold; he dissected himself and mistrusted others. He had the poetic gift, but wanted the courage and vigour of the heart to use it; his fear of ridicule made him prefer criticism to creation: he could imagine himself to be so much that he was content to become nothing. His ambition made him vain, and his vanity made him indolent. He needed a stronger and more active spirit—something to make him plunge into difficulties and struggles, and not to care if fools shrugged their shoulders. I thought I could supply what he lacked—that I could give him the blood and the warmth to render his great faculties practical. He ought to have understood the value of

such companionship as I offered him!" said Perdita, speaking with more intensity. "But what he says is not like what he is; he is a man who has fears and hesitations—the kind of man that I despise! What right had he to marry? Was not I better than marriage? But really, Mr. Fillmore, these poets are great fools: they promise a great deal, and some of them write very charmingly, but a lawyer is more of a man!"

Fillmore's face indicated that he was beginning to recover from his dulness. Still he dared not hope too soon; it might be that Perdita's words, as well as Philip's, could imply more than she meant. He waited to hear more. But she recommenced at an unexpected point.

"I have read those papers," she said, rising and going to a secretaire, from a drawer of which she took Grantley's packet. "Sir Francis knew when to die; here is what would have made it impossible for him to live. He was false, cowardly, and selfish beyond belief! And my father—Charles Grantley—was as noble as the other was base: too noble! I have no sympathy with such generosity. Let a man be as true as steel, but as hard and deadly too, when there is need! But he was my father: I know that now, and I'm going to act upon it!"

"In what way?" asked Fillmore.

"To have my rights," answered Perdita, lifting her head.

"Who has deprived you of them?"

She laughed. "That is no more than I expected. I have been yielding and complaisant so long that people—even you—have forgotten I have any rights to claim. But I am tired . . . that does not amuse me any longer. I am going to take what my father gave me."

"What did he give you?"

"Twenty thousand pounds."

"Of course you are not in earnest," said Fillmore with a smile.

"Mr. Lancaster will not agree with you."

The lawyer looked at her, and became grave. "It is too late. You passed it on to him."

"No!" said Perdita, planting her white hand on the papers upon the table. "Philip Lancaster appropriated a legacy which I did not know belonged to me. There was at that time no proof that the author of the will was my father. There was only a presumption, which, for reasons that I gave you, I refused to adopt. The death of Sir Francis, and the opening of this packet, have changed the whole matter. The proof is here, and the reasons that might influence me to dis-

regard it no longer exist. I shall claim my right; I shall take what is mine, let him prevent me who can!"

"The possession by the other party makes against you," said Fillmore. "Your surrender of the property would be an obstacle to your claiming it now. It is not easy to play fast and loose with twenty thousand pounds. You should have stated your objections earlier."

"Tell me, sir, what proof was there, until now, that Mr. Grantley was my father?"

"There was probability, and an understanding that proof could be produced if necessary."

"But it was not produced; and in the absence of it, how could Philip Lancaster, any more than I, lay claim to the legacy? His belief goes for nothing; a man would believe anything for the sake of twenty thousand pounds. The will directs that he is to possess the legacy only in case that I reject it. It is only within these two days that I have known it was mine to reject. But I shall not reject it; I shall keep it. Do you mean to tell me that he has had the audacity to lay hands upon it?"

"I scarcely know even now whether you are in earnest," said Fillmore, who was certainly perplexed. "There may have been technical delays

in the money, but there can be no doubt that he has been regarded as the owner of it, and has acted accordingly. He has incurred expenses in the furnishing of his house and other matters which he never could have afforded otherwise. For you to insist upon your claim now would inevitably be his ruin."

"I have nothing to do with that," said the Marquise, smiling, "though I may be sorry that he has been so precipitate."

"This can only be caprice in you," said Fillmore, gravely. "The legacy is nothing to you. You have property to ten times that amount."

"I must be allowed to understand my own requirements, sir."

"You must have other reasons than those you state. It is not to benefit yourself but to injure him that you do this."

The Marquise shrugged her shoulders. "Say, if you like, that to injure him benefits me."

"How should it benefit you?"

"How should it not? Does it not benefit me to injure my enemy?—the man I hate! Has he not injured me? Is it no injury to have such things said of me as you repeated a while ago? Could they have been said if he had not authorised them? Do you pretend you love me, and do you let me

be insulted by a man who gives it to be believed that I agreed to elope with him? Oh, if I were a man . . . no! A woman is better! — except when she is fool enough to love!”

Fillmore stood up, his face reddening. “No man shall insult you without giving an account to me,” he said, speaking with a certain stiffness of utterance. “My love for you gives me that right, whether you admit it or not. I should be slow to believe that Mr. Lancaster can be capable of doing what you suspect; but if he did, he shall answer for it.”

“In what way?”

“In the way customary between gentlemen,” replied Fillmore, haughtily.

“That will not suit me,” said the Marquise, shaking her head. “I am neither old enough nor young enough to care to be the subject of a duel, especially on such grounds. I must fight my own battles in my own way, but you shall be my weapon if you will.”

“Your weapon?”

“Yes: my legal thunderbolt! You shall conduct my case against him.”

“I cannot do that!” said Fillmore after a pause.

“Can you not? Then there can be nothing

more between you and me. I will never see you again."

"It would not be honourable," exclaimed Fillmore, bending forward and grasping the edges of the table with his hands. "I was employed to draw up the will, and I have acted in Mrs. Lancaster's interests, and in those of her husband. I could not retain my standing and integrity as a lawyer, and do what you ask. I could not justify it to myself as a man. My profession has brought me to a knowledge of all crime and weakness and rascality in human nature; and I have always tried to do right and justice, and I have never, for any cause, been a rascal myself. If I were to do this, it would be the last act of my professional life." Fillmore was extraordinarily moved; his voice faltered, and he stopped.

"In other words," said Perdita, with the quiet mercilessness that sometimes showed itself in her character, "you think our acquaintance has gone far enough. I agree with you, sir. I will not detain you any longer."

"No: I cannot give you up," returned Fillmore, after a short silence. He sighed heavily. In the struggle of opposing wills, he felt that the woman had the advantage. "If I refuse," he said, "you threaten me with a punishment greater than

I can bear. But if I consent . . ." he stepped forward and put his hands strongly upon her shoulders, and looked with power into her eyes. It was the first time he had ever touched her, save to take her hand in greeting or farewell. She could feel the emotion that made his arms vibrate. It gave her a new impression of him.

"What do you wish?" she asked in a gentle tone.

"What will you give me in return for what I give you?"

Perdita looked down, and hesitated.

"What will satisfy you?" she asked at length.

"You will satisfy me! Nothing else. Will you give me yourself?"

"For that you will do all I ask?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, let it be so!" she said, looking up with a momentary smile.

Fillmore stooped and kissed her. A strange, reckless sort of happiness filled his heart. He was no longer the man he had been; but Perdita was his reward.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE morning Lady Flanders, enveloped in a dressing-gown bought at a bazaar in Damascus, which made her look like the Grand Vizier in the "Arabian Nights," knocked at the room which her guest, Mrs. Lancaster, was occupying. Marion, who had not yet finished her toilet, opened the door, and Lady Flanders stalked in. She merely nodded a good morning, and did not at once explain the reason of this early visitation. With her hand behind her, she began to pace slowly up and down the room, her head bent and her shaggy brows drawn together: altogether rather an appalling spectacle. At length she halted, felt in the pocket of her caftan for her snuff-box and not finding it there, sniffed, rubbed her nose, and went up to Marion, who had resumed the combing of her hair which the entrance of her ladyship had interrupted.

"How is your health this morning, my dear?" she demanded, scowling down upon her.

"I thank you; much as usual," replied Marion, apathetically.

"Nonsense! You are not well at all: you're as pale and peaked as a charity-schoolgirl!" returned the old lady, testily. "You haven't improved at all since you came to my house, Mrs. Lancaster: and yet I've paid you every attention. I'm displeased at it!"

"You have been most kind to me, and I—" began Marion; but the other interrupted her with a peremptory gesture.

"You are altogether in the wrong, Mrs. Lancaster," she exclaimed, "and you should have discernment enough to be aware of it. I have shown you no kindness whatever; 'tis a thing I never do anyone; I have simply pleased myself, as I always do; and 'tis as likely as not I have got you and your husband into a precious scrape, only for the gratification of my own antipathies. I have always abominated that little devil of a Marquise Desmoines, and I was determined to let her know it! That is the whole secret of the matter!"

"I shall not alter my opinion, madam," returned Marion, with a smile, "and I can never forget the sympathy and protection you have given me. But I am unhappy; and I feel, now, that I did wrong to come here. I should have stayed at home with my mother."

"This is assurance, upon my honour! Where

are your manners, ma'am? Pray, is my house not good enough for you?" But, having made these inquiries in a haughty and fierce way, the great lady suddenly took Marion in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks.

"I am an old fool, my dear," said she, sitting down with a disconsolate air, and crossing one leg over the other. "I'm not fit to be trusted alone any more. My likings and my dislikings both get me into trouble. I fell in love with you the minute I set eyes on you. For fifty years, at least, I have been ashamed of being a woman, and tried all I could to act as if I were a man—doing as men do, and thinking men's thoughts—or, at any rate, talking as if I thought them. And now, since I met you, I only wish I were more a woman than I am! My dear, you are the finest creature that ever stood in petticoats, and nobody is good enough for you. And when I fancied that that Philip of yours didn't appreciate the prize he had won—which, if he were the best man alive, he couldn't deserve—it made me so angry that I could have cut that handsome white throat of his from one ear to the other. And, as if that wasn't enough, he must accuse you of improper behaviour——"

"It was my own fault, Lady Flanders," said

Marion, interrupting. "I'm sure I behaved very badly, and when I wouldn't tell him what I had been doing, I think he did quite right to be angry. I would ask him to forgive me, if he were here."

"Don't cry, my dear, it doesn't suit your character, and you only do it because you're weak and worn out, and, God knows, I don't wonder at it! As to asking him to forgive you, you would do no such thing—don't tell me!—until you were convinced he had done nothing to be forgiven for. And now," continued her ladyship, again diving into her pocket after the absent snuff-box, "I've come to tell you that I've begun to think he may not have been quite so bad as I thought. Mind—I know nothing more yet: I only make an inference. You know I pounced down upon that clever little wretch the Marquise; and from her manner, and some things she said, my suspicions about her and that husband of yours were rather confirmed than disconcerted. So rather than have you left alone in your house for people to snigger at, I persuaded you to come to me for a few days, until we could know exactly how matters stood. Poor child! You were in a state of mind not to care what became of you; and when I met your husband, that same afternoon, I had half a——"

"You met him, Lady Flanders? You never told me that!" exclaimed Marion, looking up and flushing.

"I know I didn't: why should I? I had no doubt he was on the way to that Marquise; and it was the next day, as I tell you, that I pounced down on her. Well, then . . . you shouldn't interrupt me, my dear; and—I wish you'd touch that bell: I think I must have left my snuff-box on my dressing-table."

The box was brought, and her ladyship took a copious pinch and proceeded. "Last night I heard something that disturbed and surprised me a good deal, and the source it came from was unimpeachable. I saw Mr. Merton Fillmore, and he told me that Madame Desmoines is going to bring an action against Mr. Lancaster to recover the money Mr. Grantley left him. At first I didn't believe it, but he was quite serious, and said that he was her solicitor in the matter. I told him he ought to be ashamed of himself—but 'tis no use scolding men like him, they only bow and grin, and that's an end of it! I asked him why she hadn't claimed it before, and he tried to make up some nonsense about her having only just received proof that she was entitled to it. I told him it was a scandalous piece of business, and that he

ought to have known better than to let himself be mixed up in it ; and that I didn't believe the case had a leg to stand on. But, between you and me, my dear, I shouldn't wonder if that particular kind of thieving that they call legal justice was on her side ; and I fear there may be danger. But what I was going to say is, that if she is actually setting to work to ruin your husband, it doesn't look much as if they were in love with each other, does it ?”

Marion clasped her hands together softly in her lap, and her eyes shone. A long sigh breathed from her lips, which smiled tremulously.

“Ay, ay,” said Lady Flanders, sighing also and scowling, “I know how it is ! You are feeling happier than if I'd just told you you'd been made heiress of all the money in the Bank of England ; and, by-and-by, as soon as you're able to think of anything else but Philip, you'll turn round and fly into a terrible passion with me because I misled you about him. But, upon my honour, my dear, it was only your dignity and welfare I was thinking of. And, mind you, this may be nothing but a blind, after all.”

“No,” said Marion, in a tender, preoccupied tone ; “it is true ; I am sure of it. I have been the wicked one. If he will only forgive me !”

"Never tell a person of my age and character that you are wicked," said Lady Flanders, dryly; "it is not in good taste, for it makes 'em wonder what the Recording Angel will call them. As to forgiving you, if he were here and didn't——"

"Do you know where he is?" exclaimed Marion, springing up. "Is he in the house? Oh, Lady Flanders, is he——"

"My dear, I don't know where he is any more than you do; but there's no doubt he will be found soon enough, and I hope the lesson he's had will have done him good. Meantime, there's another matter to attend to. Your good mother, Mrs. Lockhart, you know—we arranged that she should be told nothing of all this trouble; and I gave her to understand, when I took you away, that you and your husband were going into the country to visit the Earl and 'twas uncertain when you'd be back. Now, I got a letter from her this morning, saying that this was the anniversary of her wedding-day, and she wanted to spend it in the old house at Hammersmith. She was going to set out this forenoon, and it occurred to me it might be a good thing if you went with her. As your husband will probably turn up during the next few days, you would probably prefer to meet him in her company rather than in mine."

"Yes, yes," murmured Marion, who had already begun hurriedly to complete her toilet; "I will be ready in a few minutes. Yes, that will be best. . . . Oh, I thank God! I could not have gone on living—but now, even if he doesn't forgive me, I am happy."

"I shall contrive so as to see him before you do," said her ladyship; "and, after I've done with him, the only person he won't be ready to forgive will be me! Oh, 'tis just as well you both should have somebody to abuse, and I shall answer the purpose as well as anybody else. 'Tis about all an old hag like me is good for. Well, if you are going, I shall go with you and deliver you safe into your mother's hands; and probably there'll have to be some lying done, when she asks where Philip is; and I'm a better hand at that than you are. You've no idea what experience I have had!"

Here the old lady chuckled rather cynically, and, wrapping her caftan around her, stalked out of the room. Marion, left to herself, quickly went about her preparations, singing to herself at intervals, and moving with a lighter step and heart than she had known for many days. The old house at Hammersmith! It seemed like going home for the first time since the honeymoon. It was

there that her first happiness had come to her ; and if Heaven ever permitted her to be happy again, it ought to happen there. All this fever of wealth and fashionable society was as a dream that is past : freshness and sanity had returned with the morning.

Lady Flanders, with the promptness of an old campaigner who knows how to concentrate hours into minutes when there is need for it, was ready almost as soon as Marion, and the two immediately set forth for the Lancasters' house in her ladyship's big carriage, with the coachman in front and the footman behind in pigtails and silk stockings. They arrived just as Mrs. Lockhart was about to depart. She greeted them with her usual gentle serenity.

"My dear daughter," she said, embracing Marion, "your trip to the country has done you good. She has a fine colour, has she not, Lady Flanders? though I think she is a little thin. This city life is very trying ; I used to find it so before I married your dear father. But no doubt 'tis different when you have your husband to go into society with you. A happy marriage is the best health preserver in the world. Has Philip come back too? Will he come out with us?"

"Your son-in-law, madam," said Lady Flanders,

before Marion could command her voice or open her mouth, "is detained, I believe, but very probably he may join you before you return. Madam, that gown suits you admirably; and I can scarce believe, when I look at you, that so many years have passed since you were the toast of Bath."

Hereupon the lovely Fanny Pell of the last century flushed with innocent pleasure, and the colour showed through the cheeks of the gentle widow of Major Lockhart; and the difficulty about Philip was evaded for the present. After a little more conversation, Mrs. Lockhart proposed that, as the day was fine, Lady Flanders should accompany them as far as Hammersmith, and perhaps lunch with them there; and in the afternoon she might drive back in time to keep her engagement to dine at Lord Croftus'. Marion added her entreaty to those of her mother; and her ladyship—doubtless perceiving that her presence would be a protection for Marion against the guileless inquisition of Mrs. Lockhart, who was as likely to prattle about Philip and the delights of a happy marriage as about anything else—consented; and the whole party got into the carriage and rolled away on gently-swaying springs. The brief winter sunshine shone along the streets, throwing the shadow of the tall vehicle behind them; and the

pedestrians on the sidewalks stepped out briskly, for the air was crisp and bright. Christmas was not far off, and its jovial influence was already felt. The long year, with all its happiness and its misery, its failure and its success, was drawing to a close; and for the bulk of mankind the cheerfuller side of life seemed, on the whole, to have come uppermost. Marion, as she gazed out of the window of the carriage (while her mother and Lady Flanders chatted about the London of forty years ago), meditated over all which this year had brought her of good and evil, and tried to determine with herself whether, taking the good and the evil together, she would have wished this year omitted from her life. At first, with the remembrance of recent pain and suffering still fresh within her and the future still so uncertain and clouded, she thought that it would have been better for her if she had died that day she saw Philip and Mr. Grant enter the gate of the old house in Hammersmith and knock at the door. But when she began to recall more in detail all the events that had happened, she thought that, for so much happiness, all the pain was not too dear a price to pay. There was the picture in her memory of Philip telling them how he had cared for Major Lockhart on the field of Waterloo:

his voice had been tremulous as he told it, and his eyes had met hers with a sympathy so manly and so honest that her heart went out to meet it. Then had ensued that period when she withdrew herself from him, as it were, and was harsh and cold, from the untamed maidenhood that had divined its danger, and blindly sought to preserve itself at any cost. But, oh! how sweet it had been to feel, day by day, that the struggle was in vain! What fear, what joy, what self-distrust, what hope, what secret tears! And, then, that summer ride to Richmond with Philip at her side; the banter, the laughter, the betraying tones and looks, the swelling tenderness that drowned resistance; and at last, the touch of hands and the few words that meant so much! Surely, to have lived through such a day might compensate for many a day of pain!

Besides, the season of outward coldness and suspended confidence that had followed this had been founded on nothing real, and had vanished at the first touch of reality. On that black night when she and Philip groped their way through midnight ways to avert, if it might be, the peril so mysteriously foreshadowed, their spirits touched and recognised each other, and the terror of the crisis had only made the recognition more deep

and firm. On that tragic night love had avouched himself greater than all tragedy and sorrow ; more true than they, and, unlike them, eternal. The flower of this love had she and Philip plucked, and had breathed its immortal fragrance. So much the year had brought her.

But then Marion fell to thinking about the months that had since elapsed, and the significance of their story. And the more she meditated, the more clearly did it appear to her that she, and not Philip, had been to blame. For, why had she refused the legacy ? From jealousy of Philip. But, was her jealousy just ? It had been a fancy merely, a vague suspicion, founded upon hints half understood and whimsically exaggerated. A woman who is loved has no right to say, "Because another woman is more beautiful or brilliant than I, therefore my husband will care more for her than he does for me." For love is the divine Philosopher's Stone, which transfigures that which it touches ; and, for the lover, there is a beauty in his mistress before which the splendour of Helen of Troy or of the Egyptian Cleopatra seems but as dust. And let her beware lest she so far vulgarise the dignity of love as to make it one with her own estimate of herself. As justly might the Song that Solomon sang rate its worth at that of

the material forms and substances whereby it was conveyed from his mind to ours. As regarded Philip, moreover, how could he, being innocent of that which she suspected, have done otherwise than he did? For him to have yielded would have been to acknowledge himself vulnerable. And again, what justification could she plead for the dissipated and reckless life she had led since the difference of opinion between Philip and herself? None, none! It had been the ungenerous revenge which, to requite open defeat, goes about to rob the victor of the comfort of his victory. Still less defensible was this last act of hers, to which the present disastrous state of things was immediately due. To gain an end which she had ostensibly given up, she had put herself in a predicament fairly open to the worst interpretation; and then, when her husband had demanded the explanation which was his right, she had defiantly refused to give it. When a woman like Marion begins to be repentant and forgiving, she allows herself no limits; and by the time the carriage had reached Hammersmith, Marion was disposed to consider herself the most reckless and culpable of wives, and Philip the most injured and long-suffering of husbands. But where, alas! was Philip, that she might tell him so?

They turned down the well-remembered little

side street, and in another minute the carriage had drawn up before the iron gate, to which, so long ago and yet so recently, Marion had fastened the card with "To Let" written on it, which had been the means of bringing her and Philip together. The footman jumped down, opened the carriage door, and let down the steps; he assisted Mrs. Lockhart to alight, and gave her his arm up the walk. Marion followed with Lady Flanders. The old house looked forlorn, though a caretaker had been left in charge of it; the windows were dull and bare; the cedar of Lebanon had scattered its dry needles over the path and grass plot; the knocker was tarnished, the footscraper red with rust. The footman lifted the knocker to rap; but before the stroke sounded, the door was opened from within.

Marion heard her mother give a little exclamation of surprise and pleasure, and then say something in words she did not distinguish. She raised her eyes languidly; but the broad back of the liveried footman intercepted her view. Lady Flanders, however, whose vision was not thus obstructed, gave a start, and cried out, "Why, confound him, there he is!"

The footman's back disappeared and in its place Marion's gaze absorbed the vision of a tall

dark figure, a white face, black, exploring eyes, dishevelled hair—all suddenly kindled up and vivified by a flash of poignant delight. She remained standing erect on the lower step, and without moving her wide, breathless gaze, she slowly raised her hands, and clasped them together against her heart.

"Mr. Lancaster," said Lady Flanders, in a high, sharp tone, "help your wife into the house, can't you! she's feeling faint. You ought to be more careful how you play off your surprises on a woman in her condition. Why didn't you let us know you were going to be here? Come, Mrs. Lockhart," she added, seizing the latter by the arm and drawing her indoors, "let us get upstairs and take off our bonnets. That's the way with these young married people! They can't meet after a separation of twelve hours without going into such heroics and ecstasies as would make one think they had been dead and returned to life again, at least! Leave 'em to themselves, and perhaps in half an hour they'll be able to recognise our existence."

In this way the wise old woman of the world, who had comprehended the situation at a glance, at once parried whatever inconvenient inquiries Mrs. Lockhart might have made, and afforded an

opportunity to Philip and Marion to enjoy their explanation and reconciliation in private, away from the inspection of footmen and other ignorant and inquisitive persons. When she got upstairs, and before she removed her bonnet, she took out a large silk pocket-handkerchief and blew her nose; and for some time made no articulate rejoinder to the serene little observations which Mrs. Lockhart kept offering.

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“How did you happen to be here, my dearest?” said Marion in the course of the interview. “Did you know we were coming?”

“I have been here for several days, I believe,” answered Philip; “I hardly know how long, or when the days began or ended. I did not know where to look for you, darling, and it seemed most natural to come here, where we loved each other first.”

“Oh, my Philip! and were you thinking I was wicked all that time?”

“No, thank God! I don't think I ever seriously believed that. But one day, before I came here, I saw Tom Moore; he came up to me, and said he wanted to say something to me in private. So we walked across the park, and pretty

soon I found that he was talking about you. From that moment I remember every word he uttered. "Mr. Lancaster," he said, "you'll do me the credit to believe that I'm a man of honour and a gentleman, and the good name of a lady is sacred to me. I have admired and revered Mrs. Lancaster since first I had the honour to be in her presence; and though, to be sure, 'twas mighty small notice she ever took of me, my nature is not so petty that a slight to my vanity can obscure my judgment or dim my perception." Then he went on to tell me all about meeting you at Vauxhall, and what a state of excitement you were in, and how he hurried you out of sight, and put you into a carriage, and then went and got Sir Francis; and how you all drove to the inn in Pimlico, and afterwards how he saw you safe home with your maid. Then he said that tortures would never have unsealed his lips on the subject; but he had learned that, in some way, a rumour had got abroad that you were seen there. Whereupon he had deemed it due to his honour as a gentleman, as well as to his consciousness of integrity and innocence, to come to me at once, in a frank and manly way, and give me to know at first hand all there was to be known of the matter. It was very eloquent and chivalrous," added Philip, "and at any other

time I might have laughed: as it was, I just thanked him, and we bowed to each other and parted, and I came here."

"It seems like coming up out of the grave," said Marion musingly. "And now, my poor Philip, after all our quarrelling and trouble, what do you think has happened? The Marquise is going to sue for your money; and Lady Flanders says she's afraid the law may give it to her."

"Will the Marquise do that?" said Philip, arching his eyebrows.

"So Merton Fillmore says: and he is to conduct her case."

"Well," said Philip, beginning to smile, "she could not have done anything that pleases me better; for I have gained much wisdom since I saw you last, and am as anxious to be rid of that burden as ever you were. So, if you agree, my darling, we'll give her the twenty thousand pounds, without putting her to the trouble to sue for it; for there's only one sort of wealth worth having, and that is what I have been enjoying ever since I caught sight of you on the doorsteps."

"But, Philip, you know we have spent ever so much money on that miserable house in town.

What are we to do about that? for the money from 'Iduna' will not be enough to pay it."

"Why, that is all right, too," said Philip laughing: "for, though I had forgotten it till this moment, Lord Seabridge, who is not expected to live more than a week, said, when I saw him the other day, that he had put five thousand pounds in his will for me, 'just to buy my wife a present.' We can pay our debts with that, and still have a few hundreds left to begin life again in this old house." He put his arm round her waist, and added, looking down at her, "You won't object to my receiving that legacy, will you?"

"Oh, Philip!" said Marion, with a long sigh, hiding her face on his shoulder; "I wish . . . I think . . . I hear my mother and Lady Flanders coming downstairs!"

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN the Marquise Desmoines received from Fillmore a letter announcing that the defendants in the case of Desmoines *v.* Lancaster declined to defend, she uttered a sharp cry, and dropped the letter as if it had been poisonous. That

strange sense of justice—of what is fairly due to one as a human being—which is perhaps the last thing to de out of even the least deserving of God's creatures, told her heart that she had been outraged. All things had slipped away from her despite all her powers, and her desperate yearning to exercise them, she was powerless. There could scarcely be, for her, a keener suffering. With some natures, the very intensity of anguish is its own partial antidote; the faculties are so far stunned as to be unable, for a time, to gauge the poignancy of the disaster. But Perdita's clear and vigorous intellect would not permit her such an escape. She immediately saw her position in all its bearings and prospects. Her mind shed a pitiless light upon every aspect of her defeat and humiliation. Something vital within her seemed to gasp and die.

After a long, breathless pause, she took up the letter again and read it to the end. It contained a request on the part of the writer to be allowed to call on her at a certain hour that evening. It was not difficult to see what that meant. She had made the surrender of herself to Fillmore contingent upon his recovery of the legacy; and he was coming to claim the fulfilment of her promise. She would be called on to play

the part of a complaisant *fiancée*. At this picture Perdita laughed; and then, setting her teeth with rage, tore the paper into fragments. Such rage is deadly. Had Fillmore been present, his *fiancée* would have attempted his life. And yet it was not he that could enrage her: nothing that he could have done could have affected one pulsation of her heart. She had passed into a region of emotion almost infinitely more intense than any with which he could be connected. But, as sometimes a woman will kiss a child or a dog, thinking "this kiss is for my lover!" so might Perdita have driven a dagger to Fillmore's heart, and said, "Be Philip and die!"

She looked at her hands: how white and fine they were!—how beautifully formed! She rose and walked to and fro in the room; every movement was grace and elasticity—the harmonious play of parts exquisitely fashioned and proportioned. She paused before the looking-glass, and contemplated the form and features imaged there. She drew out her comb, and shook down on her shoulders a soft depth of bright-hued hair. She loosened the front of her dress, and exposed a bosom white as milk and curved like the bowl of Ganymede, save for the slight indentation of a scar on the right breast. She gazed into the sparkling reflection of her eyes, as if some mystery

were hidden there. "I have seen no woman more beautiful than you," she said aloud. "What is the use of beauty? Why was I born?"

She returned to her chair, and threw herself in it sidewise, as a child might do, with her cheek resting against the back, one knee drawn up, her hands folded, her eyelids closed. As she lay thus she looked like a type of lovely and innocent weariness. "Why was I born?" she repeated in a whisper. Her thoughts strayed back along the vista of her seven-and-twenty years: from the distance she saw the figure of a little girl, with bright hair and laughing eyes, come tripping onwards, inquisitive, observant, quick-witted, stouthearted; fond of her own way, and ready to take her own part; but good-humoured always and tolerant of others. Onward comes the child, growing taller as it advances, beginning now to realise its loneliness in the world, sometimes meditating gravely thereon, but never losing courage; beginning also to realise its own superior gifts, and exercising them experimentally, for the effect on others. Still forward she comes, with a step somewhat less frolicsome, with eyes that look more penetratingly; a mind that harbours ambitious thoughts; a face that can conceal as well as express; a confidence in herself and in her fortune;

worldly wisdom already, at seventeen years. That great broad book of the world—of human life and character—with its profundity, its insanity, its pathos, its absurdity, its veins of good, its masses of evil—the girl Perdita has studied it all; and no mother, no loving friend, has been beside her, to direct her studies, to interpret her discoveries, to correct her errors. . . . Who is this antique figure who now walks beside her, to whose formal and laborious gait she endeavours to accommodate her own: this gray-haired man of more than thrice her age, with his habits, his prejudices, his limitations, his ailments? Is this her husband?—the lord and master of that brilliant, buoyant creature? Ah, Perdita, are you his wife? Do you love him, honour him, obey him? Are he and his possessions the final embodiment and satisfaction of your ambitious dreams? Can you do without love—you, who have never tried what love is? It is ill being prudent before instruction. Why are your lips so persuasive, your eyes so winning, your touch so caressing? Why are you so lovely, Perdita? . . . Why were you born?

But still the young wife passes onward, with little misgiving and less regret. There is a great deal of splendour and luxury around her, and she easily makes herself their nucleus and culmination.

Famous men pay court to her; wise men listen to her conversation; women criticise and try to imitate her. In the brilliant society of her day and place she is a figure and a topic. Musicians dedicate their compositions to her; poets immortalise her in their rhymes of a season. She is the hero of a hundred anecdotes, but of not a single romance: very intrepid and adventurous, but with the coldness as well as the sparkle of ice. "Can't make her out," said Lord Fitz Hardinge, who was said to have come to Paris especially to be presented to her. "Don't see how she keeps it up—a woman of her complexion too. Egad! I have it. The Marquis must be Cupid in disguise!" This *mot* was repeated until it reached Perdita's ears. "A woman's complexion changes with her company," she said; "and as to the Marquis, my husband, it is better to be a disguised Cupid than a make-believe one." As his lordship's excesses had somewhat worn upon his constitution, this shaft struck deep and resisted all efforts to extract it. People seldom attacked the Marquise Desmoines more than once.

Meanwhile Perdita is still sitting in the same position in her chair, one knee drawn up, her hands clasped, and her eyelids closed. What vision does she behold now? A handsome room, with

polished floor, the walls bright with pictured panels bordered with gold; candles set in burnished sconces: the door opens and her husband enters, leaning on the arm of a tall young man. The stranger is plainly dressed, but his form and bearing are noble; and his face, relieved by the black hair around it, prints itself on her mind, never to be forgotten, so intense and vivid does it seem with life and meaning, yet so composed and clear. A new feeling, strange and sweet, creeps in gentle undulations along Perdita's nerves and settles in her heart. He sits beside her, and they converse, easily and with mutual pleasure and comprehension; his voice, grave and genial, makes music in her ears; his dark direct glance meets hers—absorbs and mingles with it. She draws fuller breath; this atmosphere, in which she has never lived before, gives her for the first time real life; she understands what she is, and what is possible for her. The Enchanted Prince has awakened the Sleeping Beauty.

The days that follow are like no other days, before or since. He is a poet, but what poetry ever equalled their companionship? The world with its follies, its emptiness, its formulas, its delusions, seems to stand aside to let them pass . . . One day they have ridden out with a cavalcade,

bound on an expedition of pleasure to some distant château. Riding onward, she and he are drawn insensibly together, they pass fleetly along woodland paths, through dancing shade and sunlight, leaving the others behind or in advance, perhaps; they have little thought but of each other. Light is Perdita's heart; no shadow has darkened it since that first meeting. The passing moments have filled the capacity of sensation, leaving no room for reflection or forecast; she has never even said to herself, "This is friendship," or "This is love:" enough that it is delight, growth, harmony, beauty; that it lets her know how sweet it is to be a woman. At last, as they ride on, the pinnacles of the château taper upward above the trees; anon, before them opens a sweep of lawn, which they cross, and alight at the broad steps that lead up to the door. They are the first to arrive; for half an hour, perhaps, they will have the house to themselves, save for the servants who are preparing the collation below-stairs.

They stroll through the airy rooms, with merry and gentle talk, until at length they enter a hall where, over the chimney-piece, is suspended a pair of antique rapiers. Perdita takes down one of these, and putting herself in a posture of offence, bids her companion take the other and

defend himself. He complies, and for a few moments laughingly parries and pretends to return her thrusts. All at once, as she presses him, his foot slips on the polished floor, and ere he can recover himself he feels his point touch her breast. . . .

At this point of the vision Perdita slightly changes her position in the chair, and a flush reddens her cheek. She breathes unevenly and her lips move. Ah, that summer noon, so distant now, when she found herself resting in his arms, her riding-habit stained with red blood—his face, his voice so near, so tender: his touch so gentle! She had looked into his eyes, and laughed softly, in mere joy. Blessed sword! that by drawing her blood had revealed their hearts to each other. But ah! why was the wound not mortal? Was not the wound that it symbolised so? Why had she not died during those few minutes—too few—that had gone by before the sound of voices and horses' hoofs announced the arrival of the party? Had anything that had happened since been worth the trouble of living through it? True, she had hoped; but hope is but the mask of despair, sooner or later to be cast aside. Before her wound was healed, the love which it had discovered had withdrawn itself, never to return.

There had been some talk about honour, obligation, duty, prudence—to which she had assented with her lips while all the rest of her rebelled; for it had not been sin that she contemplated, but only to let her heart love and be loved. Then a farewell; and afterwards a dreary blankness, amidst which she moved hardened, witty, cynical, unreconciled, until these latter days, which were bitterer and more disastrous than the first. Why was she born?

Enough of visions! Perdita rose to her feet and gazed about her. Luxury and beauty surrounded her, as they had always done; but the darkness and wilderness that were within her turned all to ugliness and mockery. There was a terrible simplicity in her situation, a lack of resources and alternatives. She walked across the room: something seemed to tread behind her; she turned quickly, but nothing was there. The sense of being dogged—pursued—still remained, however. What was it?—fate? She smiled; then shivered nervously, and stood twisting her handkerchief between her fingers. Fate . . . The idea fascinated her. Was her fate so near? and what was it like? Let it appear and declare itself! After a while she began to walk again, but now meditating profoundly. Once she stopped

before the fire, and gazed fixedly at the burning coals; then moved away once more, not pacing up and down, but wandering irregularly about the room, knotting and untying her handkerchief; sometimes, in her preoccupation, almost stumbling against a chair or table. Meanwhile her usually varying expression had assumed a certain fixedness, and there was a vertical wrinkle between her brows, which seemed not to be caused by drawing her brows together, but to have marked itself there by some other means.

At last she stopped, passing her hands across her eyes and over her hair, which she seemed surprised to find hanging about her shoulders. She twisted it up into its place again, adjusted her dress, and after pausing a moment as if to recover the thread of her thoughts, went to a cabinet at the side of the room, and looked attentively at the objects which it contained. They were mostly curiosities and works of art, such as a carved ivory cup, a box of Indian enamel, a vase of Venetian glass, figures in Dresden porcelain, a Chinese idol of silver, an antique locket of wrought gold. From among these objects Perdita selected a small, quaintly-fashioned lamp of pure crystal; it was of Persian manufacture, and bore some figures or letters of

enigmatic purport, perhaps having reference to the tenets of the ancient fire-worshippers. She examined this lamp curiously, wiping away the dust with her handkerchief, and assuring herself that it contained no crack or imperfection. Finally she placed it upon the table near the fire; and having rung the bell, bade the servant summon Madame Cabot.

"Madame," said the Marquise when the old lady appeared, "I am expecting some one to call here this evening—Monsieur Fillmore."

"Yes, Madame la Marquise."

"I wish you to lay out the black satin gown, and the diamonds—you understand?"

"Yes, Madame la Marquise,"

"I am going out now—alone: I shall not need your company. If anyone calls in the mean time, say I shall not return until to-morrow. At no time to-day is anyone to be admitted except Monsieur Fillmore: he will arrive about seven o'clock. Will you attend to this?"

"Certainly, Madame la Marquise. Will Madame dine at the usual hour?"

"No; you will dine by yourself to-day.—That is all."

"*Au revoir*, Madame la Marquise."

The old lady curtseyed and went out. Perdita

sat down at her desk and wrote several letters, which she locked up in a drawer. Her dejection seemed to have been enlightened: her demeanour was grave, but not oppressed or unnatural. Occasionally she would fall into reverie for a few minutes, but the abstraction was not painful, and was easily cast aside. In the course of an hour or so she closed her desk, and going to her room, put on a dark pelisse and veiled bonnet, and went out. The sky was overcast, and the air cold; but there was neither rain nor wind. The streets were full of people, and the shops were doing a thriving trade in Christmas goods. Perdita mingled with the crowd, and seemed to take pleasure in observing them: in gazing into the shop windows, shoulder to shoulder with them, in listening to the confused noise of voices, tramping feet, and rattling wheels. In the Strand she happened to notice four ragged children flattening their noses against the glass of a sweet shop. "I choose this," said one little girl. "Oh, I choose this!" said another, in the pride of superior discernment. "Don't yer wish yer may git it?" remarked a boy, the eldest of the party, with gloomy cynicism. "Come in here, youngsters," said Perdita; "you shall have all the candy you want!" With the matter-of-course acceptance of miracles characteristic

of children, they followed her into the shop, and presently came forth again with sweets enough to last them for a week. None of them thanked her, any more than we thank the sun for shining through a break in the clouds—the supposition being that the sun is made for that purpose. But Perdita was not in need of gratitude. She wanted to feel the actual contact of human creatures for a few hours, and that was all. Resuming her walk, she passed through St. Paul's Churchyard, and along Cheapside, where she entered a shop and made one or two purchases on her own account. Thence she turned in a southerly direction, and presently came in sight of London Bridge. It was a quaint, narrow, high-backed structure, with jutting piers, affording spaces for vendors of apples and other cheap merchandise to set up their little stalls. The bridge was roaring with vehicles and crowded with foot-passengers; there was no noisier or more populous place in London. There was a high balustrade on each side; but by stepping upon one of the semi-circular stone seats over the piers, it was possible to look over at the broad stream beneath. Perdita did this, and remained for a long time, absorbed by the spectacle. The brown river, rushing at the arches of the bridge, fell through them in boiling cataracts, with a sound

that was audible over the tumult of the vehicles and the foot-passengers above. On either bank, the wharves were thronged with shipping—straight masts and cobweb cordage, dense as primeval forests. Black chimneys belched forth blacker smoke, which trailed and brooded over the city; huge ugly buildings of stone or brick looked down hot the dark water. Millions of human beings and done all this: millions of human beings had lived and moved here, laboured and hungered, fought and conquered, struggled and succumbed, been born and died. Here was the centre and concentration of the human race, the culmination of the history of five thousand years; and what a gloomy, dirty, toiling, roaring, sordid Babel it was! And yet, what a strong charm and attraction! We battle and shout and hope in the face of death; we know that our hopes are vain, and that death is sure; we know that life is weariness, and that death is rest; we bury our parents, we know that our children shall bury us; and still generation succeeds generation—appears and disappears—and each maintains the turmoil with as much energy and earnestness as if to it alone belonged not the present only, but likewise the future and the past. Earthly life, the oldest of all deceivers, the mightiest of all hypocrites, ex-

posed and condemned at each passing moment of recorded time—by what spell does it still retain its mastery over us? Does it inspire the wish to be cheated that it gratifies? or is there something behind—within it—some reality whereof it is but the symbol, which leads us onward to another goal than that we aimed at—a goal which, were it revealed to us, we never should attain?

Chilled by long contact with the stone parapet, Perdita stopped down from her perch, and returned along the bridge. In one of the narrow streets leading towards Cheapside she noticed a small inn or ordinary, where a card nailed to the doorpost announced that a dinner was to be had inside at a cheap rate. Perdita entered. The place was low and dark, and was tolerably full of customers, most of whom were seated at opposite sides of the little oblong tables projecting at right angles from the walls. A man, seeing Perdita stand there, made room for her beside him. He wore a dirty fur cap and a top-coat of coarse cloth; had a bold, not unhandsome face, and powerful but by no means clean hands. A plate full of some sort of food was put before Perdita, and she began to eat. The man, who had nearly finished his dinner, now called for a pot of ale; and having glanced at Perdita once or twice, he addressed her:

"Say, my dear, you're a good-looking gal, do you know that?"

"Yes," said Perdita, "other men have told me so."

"What's your name?"

"Perdita."

"Perdita? Rum name that! What's your lay?"

"Nothing, in particular."

"Flush, eh? Made a houl?"

Perdita nodded.

"Hello, you!" said the man, raising his voice, "fetch 'arf a pint for this lady."

The ale was brought, and Perdita raised it to her lips, saying, "Here's your health!"

"Same to you, my dear," said the man, taking a gulp from his pewter. "By Jove! you're one of the right sort. Do you know who I am?"

Perdita looked at him. "You're a stout fellow," she said; "you look as if you could take your own part. Are you a highwayman?"

"Easy! none of that!" exclaimed the man in a low tone, catching her by the shoulder. Perdita eyed him composedly, and he presently relinquished his grasp, and chuckled. "All right," he said, "I see you know a thing or two. Now look here. I ain't got no mort. What do you say—shall we

strike hands? You and me together can do good business. What do you say?"

"What do you mean by mort?"

"Come, now! Walker! Well, wife, if you like."

"Do you mean that you'll marry me?"

"As sure as my name's—what it is!" said the man.

"Will you take care of me, and beat any man who insults me?"

"Yes, I will!"

"I have a great mind to let you marry me," said Perdita after a pause. "You'd be as good as anybody else, and perhaps better. But I've been married once, and I don't think I shall ever marry again. I'm going to do something else."

"What?"

"That's no business of yours."

"Can't yer marry me and do that too?"

"No."

"Well, look here! Think it over. I've got money, and I can make things easy for you. You'll find me here to-morrow. I ain't often met the woman I'd take to as quick as I would to you. Think it over. You ain't got any other chap in your eye, have yer?"

"I'll promise you this much," said Perdita; "if I don't marry you I'll marry no one else."

"And will you be here to-morrow?"

"If I'm alive."

"That's hearty! Well, good-bye, my dear, if you must go. Give us a kiss, won't yer?"

"Why?"

"Because I'm fond of yer."

"Truly?"

"Honour bright!"

"You may kiss me," said Perdita; and when he had done so, she added, "You have done what no other man will ever do. Goodbye!"

.

When the Marquise reached home it was after five o'clock. In the dressing-room she found Madame Cabot; the black satin dress was laid out on the sofa, and the diamonds were on the dressing-table. The Marquise performed her toilet carefully, and when it was completed she scrutinised her appearance with unusual deliberation. "Do I look well, Madame Cabot?" she asked at length.

"I have never seen Madame la Marquise look more beautiful."

Perdita smiled. "Well, I have need to look beautiful to-night. The gentleman whom I expect to-night—Monsieur Fillmore—is coming to claim my promise to marry him. A woman should

appear beautiful in the eyes of her bridegroom, should she not, Madame Cabot?"

"Without doubt! Madame la Marquise is then resolved to marry?"

"I have resolved to change my condition," said Perdita. "I am tired of this lonely life, and am going to make an end of it."

"May Madame enjoy every happiness!"

"I don't think of that—I don't expect it," said the Marquise after a pause. "After my experience, Madame Cabot, I should be a fool to look forward to happiness, either in this state or in any other. But it will be a change, at least; a great change!" She added, after a moment, "I have spoken to you of this because, when the change comes, I shall not any longer need your services. You have been comfortable with me, I hope, madame?"

"It will be a great grief to me to leave Madame la Marquise."

The Marquise seemed gratified. "You will be able to make yourself comfortable in your own way hereafter," she said. "I have arranged that you shall want for nothing in the future. . . . Well, you may leave me now. Remember that no one is to be admitted but Monsieur Fillmore; and that I am not to be disturbed till he comes."

"I shall not forget, madame."

"Good night."

"Good night, Madame la Marquise, and much felicity."

Perdita went into her boudoir and locked the door. The candles were lighted, the fire was burning cheerfully, everything was warm and luxurious. Perdita held in her hands a large vial containing a colourless fluid, and something done up in a piece of paper. These she placed on the table, beside the crystal Persian lamp, which has already been mentioned. She drew a chair to the table, and seating herself in it, unfolded the paper which proved to contain a small wick. This she inserted in the lamp, and then filled the lamp full of the colourless fluid from the vial. Finally, she lit the wick from one of the candles. It burned with a pale bluish flame, emitting, however, an intense heat.

After contemplating this flame awhile, and testing its ardour by passing her hand over it, Perdita rose up nervously, and glanced around her. She had suddenly grown very pale, and her eyes looked black. Her lips also were white, and for a moment they trembled; but only for a moment. She held herself erect, and raised her head, looking straight before her across the table,

as if at some one who stood on the other side. Her expression, at first, was haughty; but gradually it softened, and at last became exquisitely tender and gentle. Her bosom rose and fell with a long sigh. . . .

She raised her hands, and clasped them firmly over her eyes. She stooped quickly down, until her lips almost touched the bluish flame of the lamp, at the same instant drawing in a sharp, deep breath, that made the flame leap far down her throat. She tried to do it a second time, but only partially succeeded. She reeled backward, uttering no sound, and fell, as she had wished to do, on the sofa. A few convulsive movements shook her, and then she lay still, her head thrown back, and her eyes half closed. Her position had not altered a hair's breadth when, an hour later, the door was broken open, and Fillmore came in.

Perdita's death was known to many persons in London that same night; but the news did not reach Hammersmith until the next morning. It so happened that Marion was the first to receive it, by a messenger from Lady Flanders. She read the few lines, scarcely comprehending their purport; but after waiting a few moments she read them

again, and understood them. She returned upstairs with difficulty, for all strength seemed to have gone out of her. She entered the room in which Philip was, but was unable to speak. She held the paper towards him.

"From Lady Flanders, eh?" said he, recognising the handwriting. "An invitation to dinner, I suppose." He read what was written, and silence fell upon him. Marion, though she would gladly have turned her eyes away from him, could not do so. She saw the change that came over his face, and it made her heart faint. He kept his eyes down, gazing at the paper, and it seemed to Marion as if he were never going to raise them. The suspense became more than she could bear, and it gave her the power to use her voice.

"Do you know why she did it, Philip?" was her question.

He looked up, at last, with a slow and heavy movement, as if his eyelids were weighted, and met his wife's gaze gloomily.

"If I do know," he said, "it was for something very worthless."

"Have you . . . anything to tell me?" asked Marion, just audibly.

"Perdita was honest and noble: she died pure. There is nothing to tell. A priest would

absolve me ; I can never absolve myself. Many a man who has sinned is worthier to be your husband than one who has avoided sin as I have."

There followed a deep silence. Then Marion moved a step nearer to him, and said, "Do you love me, Philip?"

"I used to say 'yes' last summer," he replied; "I thought I could do anything and be anything then. Now it seems to me that I am nothing, and can do nothing. Whether I love you or not, years must tell you, not words. Such men as I are the curse of the earth."

"You are not a curse to me!" said Marion, putting her arms around him, and looking up in his face. "You are my husband, and I love you; and neither years nor words shall make me believe you do not love your wife!"

THE END.

after that I was never happier
a man who is kind is worthy to be
the friend of one who has been in the
them followed a deep silence. The
traced a way nearer to him, and said, "Do you
love me, Philip?"

"I don't know," he said, "but I
I thought I could be anything, and I
that now I know he was that I was
and can do nothing. Whether I love him or not
years ago I was not worthy to be his
and the end of the earth."

"You are not a cure to me," said Philip.
"I am not a cure to me," said Philip.
the end of the earth. And I am not
and I am not a cure to me. I am not
you do not love me?"

THE END

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